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MORE IMPERTINENCE

MORE IMPERTINENCE

By

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Author of "This Impertinence"

Illustrated by Ivan Waller

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To

Captain J. T. Cook	*9th Northumberland Fusiliers*
Major Frank Boldero	*Royal Norfolk Regiment*
Captain E. R. W. Blackmore	*7th Division Cavalry, A.I.F.*
Chief Engineer W. W. Burns	*Merchant Navy*
Captain S. Bekhradnia	*Iranian Army*
Lieut. Roy Ward	*Sarawak Defence Force*
Lieut. W. Sydney Scroggie	*Lovat Scouts*
Lieut. Alan J. Somervell	*New Zealand Artillery*
Lieut. Roman Dobrowlski	*2nd Polish Corps*
Lieut. George Reed	*Rifle Brigade*

of St. Dunstans, St. John's Wood, London.

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CHAPTER I

The Land of Regrets; Those Were the Days; A Young Man Married is a Young Man Barred; Imaginary Conversations; A Raja's Shakedown; Embryonic Blimps; Moonlight Picnics; The Sappers; Class Distinction.

BEFORE we return to India, few among us know where we are likely to be stationed. Nor do we take the trouble to inform our Indian servants when and where we may arrive. Yet, and this I believe is peculiar to India; the first to welcome their masters at the port of disembarkation are the smiling faces of many old servants.

How do our servants know when and where we may arrive? I don't know. Therefore, on my return to India a few years ago, I decided to try to solve the mystery by questioning an old servant, who claimed that he had: "Protected thee with the sweat of my affection till thy feet had jumgiard."

He meant that he had looked after me until he was satisfied that I had become adroit among women.

"How did'st thou get to know of my coming, Abdul?" I asked.

"The movements of those who are loved are known to all who love," he gravely replied.

His charming, disarming reply, prevented further questioning and the mystery remains unsolved.

As I expected, many of my former servants were waiting on the landing stage, but as the tender closed in, I could not fail to catch furtive looks mingling with the sunshine of their smiles. I knew what those anxious looks betrayed. My servants were delighted to see me, but were eager to know if I was safe, sound, and single. Above all, if I was single. All were prepared to serve again, provided I had not married while on leave.

It may be true, as Kipling wrote, that a young man married is a young man marred, but in India, a young man married is a young man barred by good servants.

And why?

I happen to know. For fear, however, of being damned as a misogynist, by that illogical sex, misnamed the weaker, I hasten to add that I happen to know because of a conversation I overheard (overhearing is far more interesting than hearing) between two servants.

Said Farid Bux to his friend Manzur Ali: "You ask why I forsook the service of my late master, considering that he was kind to all, and not even denying unto his servants their mid-day rest?"

"Aye," said the friend.

"It was because he took unto himself a wife."

Manzur Ali spat understandingly.

"Before that female calamity descended upon him, our sahib was generous in all things. He overlooked our faults, cherished us, and not even the godown, wherein the English stores were kept, was secured against his servants, who were thereby able to obtain tea, sugar, oil, and other comforts, each according to his needs."

"Bismillah!" exclaimed Manzur Ali enviously. "He must indeed have been a prince among sahibs."

"He was so," Farid Bux agreed moodily and continued: "Then came an evil day when our master married and there was no peace to be found in his household."

"Thy master was unfortunate. Is it not truly said

among us that it is easier to find the eel amidst a bag full of snakes, than to set eyes on a good woman ? "

Farid Bux thought so too. After a short pause he said indignantly : " Thereafter the godown was secured by her orders, thus depriving us of our needs, and even our mid-day rest was disturbed. But worse was to follow. Our mistress became a khut-khut (one who nags) and none was safe from her tongue."

Manzur Ali spat once more. An orthodox method of expressing contempt for white men who marry.

" I ask thee," moaned Farid Bux, overcome by self-pity, " did not we nurse him when ill, protect him from danger, and were willing to procure for him, if necessary, the choicest maidens in the bazaar ? I ask thee, therefore, why stood he in need of a wife ? "

" I wonder ? " murmured Manzur Ali.

As I moved away, I too wondered.

I was back in India. With my feet planted on the Apollo Bunder, my back to the sea, I breathed happily as my nostrils sensed the familiar smell of jasmine, marigold, acrid tobacco and ghee.

What a homecoming ! What a joyful reunion with affectionate servants who clustered round like a pack of excited dogs. Old scores were forgotten. My hasty temper ; their damnable prevarication. My northern energy. Their eastern ararm (ease).

Then followed service. Service that is accepted as a right and cannot be purchased.

" My luggage ! Where is it ? " I asked, looking about anxiously.

" Even now it is in a bullock cart and on the way to thy hotel," came the chanted reply.

" Summon a taxi-gharry, then."

" That too has been arranged. For ere thy feet touched the shore, one was detained and now awaits thee."

" To the hotel, then."

" The best rooms in the Taj Mahal Hotel have already been set aside for thy greater comfort, and one of thy servants awaits thee."

I did not know where I might be stationed. Nor could I, until I reported my arrival at headquarters. I therefore asked my head servant if he knew.

" We go north," he said with pride. " Back to our regiment."

" And by what road did such knowledge come to thy ears, Abdul ? " I asked.

" By way of a blood-relation, sahib. He is but a clerk in the Secretariat and told me when asked. As was his duty to me," Abdul added.

Little can be kept secret in a land where relatives and in-laws feel it their duty to inform even distant connections of confidential orders that might affect them.

The servant who had been deputed to meet me at the hotel, thrust the hotel porter aside, and rushed forward to open the door of my taxi. After greeting me with a two-handed salaam that swept to the ground, he dusted my shoes with a towel snatched from the porter and said gravely: " The dhobi (washerman) awaits to receive thy soiled linen, which will be returned duly washed within but a few hours. The torn mosquito-net over thy bed has been replaced by one that is new. Thy bedlinen, which was not overclean, has been changed, and the hotel servants have been warned of the kind of food that suits thy stomach. Moreover, the water for thy teeth was boiled and filtered before being placed on thy washstand ; and the sweeper, who awaits thy pleasure, has swept thy room. The bigli-buthee (electric bulb) has been replaced by one which shines like the sun, and the bigli-punkha (electric fan) has been newly oiled and noiseth no more. Have I thy permission to depart now and order a compartment to be set aside for thee in the train which departs on the night of tomorrow ? "

" Aye," I replied, " depart now, but explain to me the

meaning of rooms being set aside for me in this hotel. My need is one room and not two or more."

" We, thy servants considered the matter between us. It was then agreed that we could not let it be said by the hotel servants that other sahibs, who are staying here, are greater than thee. Therefore, we warned those who look to the hotel to set aside the best rooms for thy greater comfort."

" And for what other purpose did'st my servants take such regard for my comfort ? " I asked.

The poor fellow tried to conceal a khaki blush and turned his face aside. The truth then followed. " It was also done in order to gain honour for thy servants among the nokur-logue (hirelings) in the hotel."

A man must indeed be a poor fish if he is not an hero to his Indian valet. For Indian servants are hero-worshippers who delight to bask in reflected glory.

Knowing my servants ideas of suitable accommodation, I thought it would be wise if I exchanged a few words with the hotel management before moving into the rooms set aside for my " greater comfort." I wished to make it clear and I could not afford to live up to the reputation I had earned among my servants. At that particular moment the hotel management happened to be the Goanese reception clerk. He listened patiently and assured me that the management were aware that I could, if I wished, afford to purchase the building; that I need not feel anxious about the bill because my presence would raise the tone of the hotel.

Another charming, disarming reply, which raised my spirits and saved my pocket.

I slept in a Raja's shakedown that night for the price of a Bloomsbury bed and breakfast.

I, of course, wondered why I was being treated so nobly. Abdul, my servant, explained why.

" It is because we told the keepers of the hotel that thou art a Lord Sahib," he said simply.

" But, Abdul, I am no Lord."

" Thou art a Lord in our eyes and that should be sufficient for bunnias " (traders) he said contemptuously.

And thus does India spoil some of us.

Twice during my career in India have I been mistaken for a Lord. On both occasions I protested vigorously, and it still rankles to know that I never succeeded in obtaining redress.

On the following morning I called at Military headquarters for instructions. I expected to be seen by someone in authority with a be-damned-to-you-look, who would order me to proceed forthwith, somewhere. That being the recognized procedure. For authority must be austere, or authority fails to impress. I was seen, but only just. The building swarmed with officers in motion who hurried from room to room or pondered about corridors frowning authoritatively. Being a simple bloke, I thought that the Indian frontier was alight and that the staff were terribly worried about forage, transport, and service groceries. None noticed me, or only just, so I commanded a brass-bound chuprassi, clothed in purple and gold, who deserved a salute because of his magnificence, to guide me to anyone interested in waifs. The chuprassi led me to a bored subaltern, marooned in a large room, who asked me to search him when I enquired where I was likely to be posted. The bored lad hungered for news of London, the theatres and night life, and refused to be searched till I told him all I knew. Then, sighing deeply, he called for my personal file and frowned as he glanced through it. The file defeated him, of course. He then did as we all do in India. He summoned the Head Babu and asked him if he knew that was to become of me. Babus are memorative wizards. He whispered to the Sub., who again did as we all do in India. " As I thought," said the Sub., and turning to me ordered me to proceed forthwith to Ghorabad.

" Good enough ! " I exclaimed. Ghorabad was said to be one of the best stations in the North.

" Doing anything to-night ? " he then asked.

" Of course ! I'm off by the night train."

" Why not dine with me and leave to-morrow ? "

" Because I'm ordered to proceed forthwith."

" Don't take any notice of that, old boy. No one ever does. If awkward questions are raised, you can depend on me to put matters right."

" Hum," I murmured, indecisively.

" I take it, then, you will join me to-night at the Yacht Club ? "

And thus does India tempt us.

I was tempted, but refused the invitation and decided to push on, for fear that one thing might lead to another with serious consequences for me. A sound decision, as the past had often proved that when one thing seemed unlikely to lead to another, I usually made it so, if the girl was worth the risk.

A few hours later, I drove to the railway station and found that my servant, a deceitful fellow, whose misdemeanours received my approval when they suited my convenience, had reserved a four berth, first class compartment, for my sole use and " greater comfort."

" How did it happen ? " I asked, as I gazed into the comfortable compartment, containing all my kit.

"I but spoke a few words to the station master, whereupon he caused such to be set aside for thee."

" Did those few words deceive the station master into the belief that thy master is a Lord sahib ? "

" Even so," said the faithful fellow, briefly.

I laughed. But the smirk faded from my face when the station master, an ex-petty officer, Royal Navy, hurried forward to see if the Lord Sahib was comfortably stowed and shipshape.

Anything may happen now, I thought.

The station master's look of astonishment when he met a junior looking, senior officer, gave place to suspicion, and he lowered a partly raised arm to recover the half of a salute.

Not a word passed between us at first. I felt nervous and feared I might be winkled out of my compartment, or have to share it with a stranger. Like all Englishmen, I resent strangers trespassing on my preserves. More particularly

if my preserve happens to be a railway carriage in which I was in first. Moreover, I dislike " sitting cheek by jowl with strangers," as the babu remarked, when confronted by a family three-hole privy on the continent.

However, I need not have feared. Sailormen are sailormen the world over, in any kind of rig. When I saw a knowing grin spreading across the station master's face, I knew it was safe to ask him to share a bottle of whisky in the compartment that was now wholly mine.

Having assured me that he felt " bung up and bilge free ", after sinking half a dozen stiff tots, he hiccuped a course to the dining car and instructed the Mug cook to see that I was well fed during the journey.

Mugs were river pirates and prospered exceedingly till their depredations were suppressed. They then took to cooking and are recognized as the best chefs in the East. But their piratical instincts have never deserted them and they now practice in our kitchens.

The whisky may have been unusually potent ; it might, of course, have cascaded into an empty stomach ; as the train commenced to move I waved at my new friend, who trembled at the salute and swayed to attention.

I settled down in comfort and was fully prepared to take the good with the good during the long journey.

" Alas ! How the wicked prosper ? " I thought, and chortled. It seemed to be wiser to prosper with the wicked, than to suffer with the good. Not a Christian-like spirit, I suppose. But I was no Christian, although I might have been a Christian without portfolio ; for that was how I was described by a Brahmin friend when he heard that I seldom went to Church.

With or without portfolio, I was, indeed, a thoroughly conceited, unlicked cub.

The end of a comfortable journey found me at Ghorabad, a delightful cantonment with a tolerable climate, lovely scenery, and cheerful companions.

Taken as a whole, the men worked fairly hard, played

strenuously, and quarrelled happily about nothing. The women were heat-shy, wall-bound, bone-lazy, and bickered among themselves about the men. The elderly women formed an exclusive club within the station club, nicknamed Bijapur, the place of interesting ruins. Young women and girls were not permitted to become members of the so-called Bijapur club, because of their youth and good looks. Which, after all, is very natural.

Our principal diversions were moonlight picnics, named pagal khannas or mad dinners, by Indian servants, who cannot understand why we prefer to dine in discomfort beneath the stars when we can dine in comfort at home.

These picnics usually took place in the beautiful gardens laid out by the East India Company for the benefit of their servants. Similar gardens are to be seen in many parts of India, but these dream-like places, timbered with magnificent trees, coloured by flowering shrubs, through which fireflies flit by night or come to rest on the waterlilies floating on the silvery lakes, sunk in cool green lawns, are sadly neglected, because beautiful gardens do not produce revenue.

Our moonlight picnics were very popular among all who possessed marriageable daughters, but they were dangerous pastimes for bachelors, and elderly women, whose husbands posed as gay dogs. Whether the danger lay in the moonlight or in the romantic surroundings, coupled with champagne cocktails, only the wounded knew. But all, excepting the married rips, who could not be snared again, and who therefore feared neither a near miss nor her more distant mother, agreed that there was little hope for the misguided fellow who helped a girl to search for fireflies in dark shrubberies.

Casualties were terrific in many of these engagements.

But not every Jill got her Jack. Not even when Jack was Jill's last round-up, corralled in some distant glade.

Such was proved by Miss Gurrum Cheeze, the determined daughter of a most determined mother.

" Did he propose, dear ? " whispered the mother, soon

after her daughter returned from an embracing saunter in the dark.

" He did not," she said, petulantly. She then flushed and exclaimed indignantly: " That man ought to be handcuffed ! "

However, in fairness to the girls, it is a fact that not every Jack knew how Jill got her Jack.

But why should I, who escaped, relate the affairs of girls who fought for security or longed for affection ? They were remarkably nice young things.

My duties were concerned with smells. And, more often than not, my duties concerned the entire station. On such occasions I earned the opprobrium of all. I was the station scavenger; O.C. Scavengers, in fact. But, unlike the Sanitary Inspector, an outcaste who deals with civilian stinks, I was welcomed in the best circles because I dabbled in cantonment odours.

In India, there are smells and odours ; civilian smells and military odours. Pugh ! Although odours dominated my life, I never cared to brag about my job. Among other odours I had to cope with were station drains, septic tanks, incinerators, mules, camels, sweating recruits, and that appalling dump at the outskirts of all cantonments ; the journey's end of unspeakable carts that pass in the night.

I was drilling a squad of sweating recruits in the blazing sun and saw the Adjutant approaching.

" Hi there ! The Colonel wants you," he shouted.

" What about ? "

" You're seconded."

" Good God ! Why ? "

" Ask the C.O. Cut along ! He is not in the best of tempers. I'll take the men."

As I strode across the dusty parade ground, bordered with giant mango and sacred peepul trees, I wondered where the Gods intended to send me. I hoped it might be to a cushy job in Simla where, it was rumoured, men had little to do among the scores of young married women who migrate to

the hills at the approach of the hot weather. These thermically divorced women crowd the hotels, and if they lose on the swings they gain on the roundabouts, because sinful men steal to the hills, and make hay among the mountain darlings, while their husbands scorch on the burning plains.

Many pleasant prospects swept through my mind, and long before the orderly-room came into view, I was in possession of a lovely cottage overlooking a delightful Simla valley, and on desirable terms with scores of delightful grass-widows in that stimulating hill resort.

But when I entered the orderly-room and saluted, the Colonel brought me back to earth.

" You are seconded to the Political Department," he said shortly.

" Why, sir ? "

" Don't ask questions ! " he barked.

I compressed my lips.

The Colonel was a lovable old warrior who disliked me at first sight. That did not surprise me as I was inclined to be insubordinate after years of freedom in the desert, where I was employed on famine relief, prior to rejoining my unit. I also found it difficult to be obsequious. I could not say : " Yes, sir. No, sir. Indeed, Colonel. Of course, Colonel. What's yours, Colonel ? Have another, Colonel ? Well played, sir ! Bad luck, Colonel ! Good for you, sir. You know best ", sir, and such army twaddle. I thought that he should be satisfied with, sir, or colonel, three times a day, before and after food.

My Colonel may have been a typical Colonel Blimp. But, if I laughed at the Colonels of Poona—*their* integrity has never been questioned. And I blush to admit that I also have failed to appreciate how much the Empire owes to the caricatured Colonels from Poona.

" May I ask what you mean by the Political Department ? " I asked.

He smiled. " Speaking as a soldier, it is my considered opinion that the Political Department stinks. You may,

perhaps, understand me when I tell you that on more than one occasion, and I am speaking from experience, the Political Service has blundered the army out of a nice little scrap on the frontier."

" My God ! I exclaimed.

Yes ! Stinks is the word.

The old warrior must have been thinking of a lost D.S.O. or two and the memory rankled.

" Can you tell me where I am to be stationed, sir ? "

" There," he grunted and placed a finger on the map spread before us.

" Great Guns ! Miles from civilization and bang in the middle of the jungle."

" I'll admit that its a bit jungly, but your headquarters will be at Rajpur. Not a bad little place, I'm told, with the usual number of civilians and their women."

" And my work ? "

" You will be in charge of the public works in the Indian States controlled by the Political Agent. Glad to go ? "

" No, sir. I hate the thought of leaving here."

" Not afraid, are you ? "

" I think so," I admitted.

" Afraid ! " he roared. " Afraid ? Good God ! I'd have gladly shed an arm for such a chance when I was your age."

The Colonel could be heedlessly improvident at times. He thought nothing of shedding an arm, losing his head, or even parting with his soul, for something he coveted. He had been heard to offer an arm for a drink, his head for a different job, and his chances of Heaven for a spot of leave. Another of the Colonel's capricious notions was his averred ambition to discipline any and every woman who provoked his intolerance. He had a peculiar longing to own women who were deservedly disliked. When such women incurred his displeasure, he invariably exploded with rage and roared : " I wish she belonged to me ! I'd like to put the virago across my knee ! "

Observing my irresolution, after asking me if I was glad to

leave, he became jocular, and said : " Do you remember what Kipling wrote about us ? "

" No," I replied, and tried to remember where my C.O. and I were mentioned in that great man's works.

" I mean what Kipling wrote about the Sappers ? "

" I don't think I do."

" When Kipling wrote : ' There is only one Corps which is perfect—that's us,' he was referring to the Sappers. He was right too. Damn right ! He was no less right when he said that Old Noah only got away with the Flood, because he came across some old pontoon plans of ours, and that Joshua monkeyed with the Sun, because he was Captain of Sappers."

With such a regimental record behind me, I determined to put away my doubts and not let the corps down.

It seemed like going home to despair as I walked back to my three roomed whitewashed bungalow, with the withered pot-garden in the verandah ; I hated the thought of leaving the station and my friends. But, I reflected, that is always the way with service in India. It no sooner brings a man into contact with some of the very best fellows that God gave breath to, than the poor devil is transferred to some other part of the country. He has no voice in the matter, is not consulted and there is no appeal. So he goes off, disgusted and angry, prepared to despise heartily the new and doubtless uncouth companions that an unkind providence has decreed shall render intolerable his future existence.

Happily, the revulsion soon passes and, slipping back into the old routine, he finds himself forming new friendships and new loyalties. Prominent among these looms unswerving loyalty to the province to which he has been detailed. Men stationed in the Punjab become superciliously confident that the Punjab is the only province worth serving and pity those unfortunates who are stationed in other parts of the country. The same is true in every other province. Wherever men serve, they all agree that the natives of their particular province are the most loyal and intelligent people in India. The same can be said of the Indian army. The British

Officers of a Sikh regiment are confident that only Sikhs make good soldiers and look down on a regiment of Jats. Whereas Jat officers are just as certain that Sikhs cannot be trusted. The women, of course, think with their men and an additional class distinction has developed that becomes very evident on boardship where people from all provinces meet and the women form provincial or regimental cliques. It is hardly safe to speak to fellow passengers till class distinctions such as pay, service, seniority, regiment, and province, have been rigorously checked.

For some unknown reason the province of Madras, known as the benighted province, comes lowest in rank, and all who serve in that unfortunate area are classed with untouchables.

It is a great game played seriously by all. Only the Eurasian is barred from taking part, for no matter what province he was born in, he cannot gain merit by claiming to be a Punjabi or Bihari Eurasian. He is just an Eurasian. But the Eurasian is foolhardly who claims Madras as his birthplace.

My few remaining days were spent in dropping P.P.C. cards—French for : " Ta, ta, for the present,"—on all the people I knew.

The rules to be observed when calling are peculiar to India. To commence with, it must be clearly understood that the caller is callable. That means he must possess some qualification which passes him through the social mesh designed to prevent undesirables from entering English society in India. Blackguards are not undesirables if they happen to be members of one of the services. The elimination of such characters might prove embarrassing. Enough said ! The fortunates who pass through the social mesh, designed by themselves, are : Soldiers, Sailors, the Indian Civil Service, Public Works, and Police. Their wives have to be prized through with influence, at times. Railwaymen, Bankers, and legal Blisters, provided, of course, that their wives are passable, wriggle through the mesh and mix with the service coterie, who accept them with much the same resignation as they accept colds.

Merchants—Box-Wallahs in the vernacular, an apt term, derived from Indian peddlers who peddle trinkets in boxes from house to house—cannot slip a finger through the social mesh, for they are traders, not professional men. Which, of course, bars them from mixing with real sahibs! But Box-Wallahs are moneyed men, and whether it be cause and effect, or a combination of both, their women are good-lookers, whose exclusion from society is deplored by many married men and all bachelors. These good-lookers, finding themselves thwarted for the first time in their lives, employ every womanly guile to overcome the shameful enceint brought about by their husband's position. To gain their objective, some good-lookers have been known to tempt influential men with visions of a little successful poaching. But society wives know every gambit in that pushful game, and their unfortunate husbands, whose hopes were raised to fever heat, relapse into a state of deaded bliss, once more. One of the saddest sounds in an Indian station is the persuasive coo, whimpered by an elderly husband, when imploring an ageing wife to admit a pretty rival into their set.

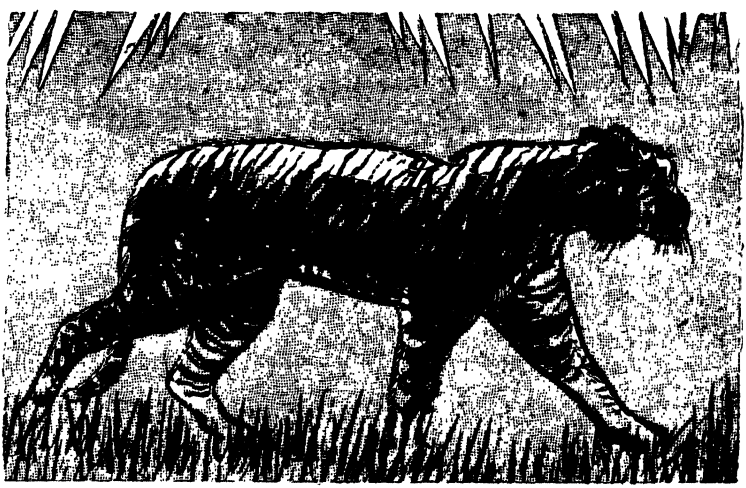
A few rich Box-Wallahs, disguised as feudal barons—Knights of Calcutta, that city of dreadful nights—who have purchased titles by peddling in hides or some such indignity, bruise their way through the social mesh, but they can find little satisfaction in paying their way into a society which holds them in contempt.

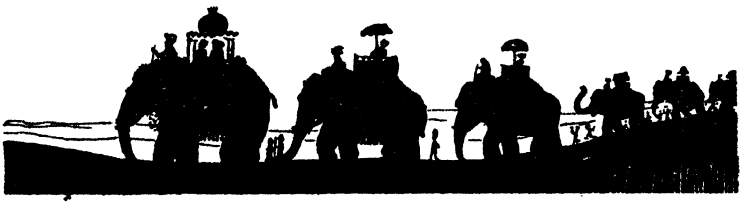
If I write feelingly about traders, it is because I too have suffered.

I was transferred to a small cantonment garrisoned by a certain regiment. The Mess President informed me that he was unable to invite me to become an Honorary Member of their mess as I was not a Rifleman. It may have been cheap, it was certainly not original, but I derived a flicker of satisfaction when I had the honour to inform the Mess President that Sappers were only permitted to become guests of Royal Regiments.

Thereafter I dined alone and felt like an outcaste, a trader, in fact.

And that raises a vexed question. Whereabouts is the line of demarcation between trade and profession? Is it not the duty of a Bench of Bishops, aided by a Chicanery of Lawyers, to give a ruling on an ache that causes more misery among the whites than the insuperable caste-barriers among Indians?





CHAPTER II

Oriental Farewells; An Injured Girl; Intimate Pellets; Man with Tired Feet; Woman's Hour; Ignorance is Bliss; Get Thee behind Me, Satan!

FAREWELLS are far too common in India. It therefore did not hurt my feelings when my brother officers managed to get as far as the mess verandah on their way to the railway station to see me off. The Indian, on the other hand, is very sentimental. When I arrived at the station with servants, kit, and a couple of long dogs, the Indian Officers crowded around me. They garlanded me from head to foot with ropes of jasmine and thrust two huge bouquets of roses, sprinkled with rose-water, into my unwilling hands.

I, too, was sprinkled.

The Indian takes a curious delight in drenching the sweetest scented flowers with some overwhelming perfume.

Then, festooned with flowers, scented like a girl tubbed in cheap bath-salts, and encumbered by bouquets, I tried to shake hands with the men as I tripped over my floral decorations and blushed at the sissy send-off.

The two men who occupied the carriage I intended to

travel in, were amused at my embarrassment. But the grins came off their silly faces when they saw my servants piling my kit into the carriage. Being globe-trotters, they could not know that white men will not part with their kit when travelling by train. Before fastening the dogs to a necessary fitting in the lavatory, I asked my travelling companions if they were afraid of dogs. They, of course, assured me that all dogs were devoted to them. But later, when either found it necessary to take an interest in the lavatory I was asked to remove the dogs.

When the dogs were stowed away, my servants started on my kit. It was not a roomy compartment, but in went a bathtub, overflowing with saddles, girths and bridles. A bundle of polo sticks and half-a-dozen hog-spears, were followed by bedding and two large sacks containing kitchen utensils. A dripping cane basket, holding a dozen bottles of soda-water, had to be stowed somewhere, and so had my trunk, uniform case, hatbox, soiled-linen bag, and an enamel washbasin fitted with toilet requisites.

A private wash-basin seems superfluous in a compartment furnished with washing facilities. It is not so, as the wise do not make use of lavatory basins on Indian railways. I may as well be frank. The Indian is particularly pernickety of that which enters his mouth ; but that which flows therefrom concerns him not ; and lavatory basins make handy receptacles. Another good reason is—how can I explain without offending the squeamish ? I'll try. When necessary, the Indians, a cleanly people, cleanse themselves with water and employ paper to write on.

Lastly, alone, erect, and treading as reverently as an acolite—and all formed a sanitary cordon around this untouchable of untouchables—came my sweeper, carrying a brightly varnished commode, balanced on his head. Like the wash-basin, his commode accompanies the owner everywhere. And like his toothbrush, the commode is unshared and inseparable. Guests are warned off it, and squatter's rights are unheard-of. An ancient commode might, in

truth, pass as a bosom-companion were bosoms placed elsewhere.

It would have been unlike me to arrive at Rajpur without some entertainment on the way, so I detrained at Ghaziabad in order to shoot, and told my servants to continue their journey with my dogs and most of my kit.

Unfortunately, I had an unhappy experience with a young Indian girl who became an interested spectator and suffered more than one near miss as I swung my gun at jinking snipe. I entreated her to be off, but the silly girl hung about near some reeds and it was only a matter of time before a peppering of shot brought her down. Her screams attracted a number of men who were working in nearby fields. They thought I had shot the girl deliberately and surrounded me, armed with lathis. (Ironbound staves).

At that moment, mine was what insurance people call a bad life. Fortunately I remembered that the tongue is mightier than the lathi, provided it comes into action immediately and is both foul and fluent. Mere parleying with angry men is mistaken for weakness and invites trouble. Before the men had time to set about me, the foulest abuse poured from my lips. Among many interesting facts, I told them what I thought of their morals, the morals of their wives, sweethearts, daughters, mistresses, grandmothers, and the unborn female child. None was spared, and when my tirade ended, not a man among them had a decent woman attached to him. I then told them how the accident happened and said I was prepared to compensate the silly wench, although it was her fault.

Indian women are shy. But women are women all over the world, I mean—and they know when modesty does not pay. As soon as that young wench understood that I was prepared to pay one rupee for every shot found in or about her, up went her skirts. " Count, sahib ! " she exclaimed. " Count with care and lose none in thy counting. And as for thee ! " she stormed at the men who crowded round when the

curtain went up, " turn aside, for this, a girl's nakedness, is no entertainment to be enjoyed at the sahib's cost."

I assayed her young body as dispassionately as a doctor examines an attractive patient, and prized out eleven intimate pellets with the tip of my penknife. Then, being overwrought perhaps, I gave my victim eleven rupees and smacked her.

The delighted girl placed the money in her brassière, and looked at me as a flapper gazes at her sugar-daddy. She then whispered to one of the men, who nodded. He whispered to the others and all nodded in agreement.

" What now ? " I asked.

The girl said shyly : " Wilt accompany us to our village ? "

" Aye," I replied and ejected the cartridges, placed in my gun in case of trouble.

She led us to a small village, shaded by mango and tamarind trees, and into the grog shop.

One does not say : " What's yours ? " in a village drinking hut because there is no choice. The only available liquor is distilled from the mhowa blossom. It is served in half pint earthenware jars and is far more potent than surgical spirit.

All drinks were on me.

While we were drinking, a retired Indian Officer entered, and when my companions told him that I, too, was a soldier, he asked me to touch his sword hilt. Which meant that rightly or wrongly his sword was at my disposal.

We all became as brothers after the third half pint of surgical spirit and I then gathered that there was no act of daring my inebriated brothers would not undertake on my behalf.

It is as difficult to earn the confidence of sober Indians as it is easy to gain their affections when tipsy. This, it seemed, was the time to question the men about their grievances.

" Tell me," I said, " now that we are as brothers, does the foot of the Government weigh heavily upon ye who are cultivators ? "

" Toward me," said the old soldier, " the Government has always been just. From sepoy to officer, mine honour has

been upheld and my pension arrives on the appointed day. What more, therefore, can a man desire ? "

But retired soldiers—known as men with tired feet—are a class apart whose loyalty is unquestionable, and I wished to hear what the peasant thought of district officers and the Government, as I had heard all I cared to hear about district officers, from district officers, and of the Government, from those who governed.

During the sipping silence that followed an exciting and spirituous debate, I summed up and gathered that none cared who governed, provided the people were left in peace and taxed lightly.

Our prolonged sipping was interrupted by my girl friend who entered and whispered to the old soldier.

" Come," he said, " and eat. A hut has been set aside wherein thou canst take thy food in peace."

After I had eaten, he advised me to stay in the hut till it became cooler and commanded the girl to remain with me in case I required anything. Indian etiquette prevented me from telling him that all I required was to be left alone to sleep off my share of mhowa liquor.

Then, with left hand behind the back and breast to breast, we asked the Gods to protect us.

An Indian greeting and farewell.

I wondered how he dared to command someone's wife or daughter to remain with me and, before he left I asked: " Who then, is she ? "

" She is the widow of a chamar," (outcaste) he said contemptuously.

Widows are wonderful, in song and in my bath, but not in India. There, women—and children whose marriages may not have been consummated—are widdowed because they have incurred the God's displeasure. Their's is then a life of slavery till death. Why are widows treated so abominably ? To prevent unhappy wives from becoming happy widows by placing a pinch of arsenic in a cruel husband's gruel ?

" Sahib," the girl whispered, as I was trying to find sleep, " have I thy permission to speak ? "

" Speak," I replied drowsily.

" One of the shot from thy gun pierced my breast-cloth. It is of little use now."

" Why did'st thou not say so when I counted the shot in thy—er—er—about the legs ? "

" Because of a girl's shyness, sahib."

Gosh ! I thought. Can this be the girl who bared her body for a few rupees, and now claims that shyness prevented her from removing her brassière ?

" How many rupees will a new breast-cloth cost ? " I asked.

" Three, sahib."

I gave her three rupees.

" Some bangles of glass were also broken at the time of shooting," she purred.

" How much ? "

" But one rupee, sahib."

One rupee followed the others.

" Has't thou forgotten the skirt which was pierced by eleven of thy shot, O sahib ? "

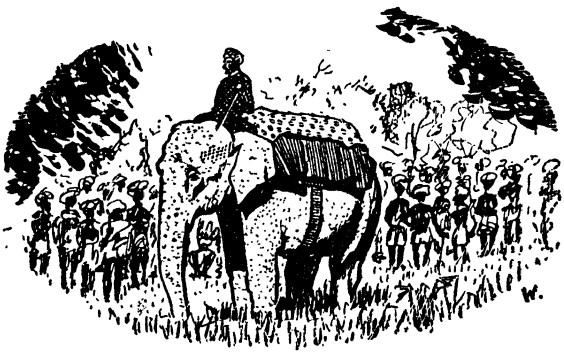
" How much did the skirt cost ? " I groaned.

" Only five rupees, Maharaj."

I paid.

She was an attractive wench, but she was also a gold-digger who blackmailed me with feminine deliberation. I rose, gathered the frightened girl in my arms, and placed her outside the hut.

I was getting short of cash.



CHAPTER III

A Frightened Man; Holy Men; Seductive Women; Navy Mixture; Opium; Midwives; Without Benefit of Clergy.

THE train in which I had to continue my journey to Rajpur rolled into Ghaziabad station at midnight. Railway guards are as fond of duck and snipe as niggers adore chicken, I therefore told a porter to place the birds into an empty first class carriage, where they would be reasonably safe from prowling railway men. The lazy fellow heaved them into the nearest compartment and, when I entered, I noticed a man asleep on the opposite bunk. With some regard for my companion's rest I refrained from switching on the light and groped my way across a carpet of birds to my bunk.

Sometime during the night the train stopped and my

companion, who was unaware of the slaughter beneath him, felt an urge to visit the lavatory.

" Good God ! What the Hell ? " he shouted.

Hastily switching on the light, I saw a frightened man crawling to the safety of his bunk across some slithering horror on the floor. He found it impossible to obtain a purchase on birds that rolled beneath him like enormous marbles and down he came time after time. Inclined to be peevish when he saw the cause of his fright, he turned out to be a remarkably good fellow. I helped him to his bunk and as we picked feathers from between his toes, he chortled : " Young fellow, do you always travel like this ? "

He then looked at some tiny jack snipe. " How did you manage to get those ? " he asked.

Before I had time to tell him that they were matured birds, he lowered my youthful dignity. " Trod on a nest, I suppose ? " he said seriously.

When we arrived at Delhi I asked the station master to send the birds to the ladies in the station. I knew no one in Delhi and many women must have wondered why an unknown man took an interest in strange skirts. The station master, an intelligent Eurasian, told me of a strange rumour.

" Have you heard the latest bazaar gossip ? " he asked.

" I don't know."

" The Indian Empire is doomed, sir."

" Why ? "

" Because we have moved the capital from Calcutta to Delhi. The Indians say that the Raj who builds a new capital in this God forsaken land loses the Indian Empire. An historical fact, so they say, sir."

" That's all right by me," I replied in faultless American.

I sometimes wonder if Cripps and his colleagues employed a similar expression when they transferred our Great Despondency to Nehru, Jinnah, and Gandhi, Limited. I say, in all piety : Perhaps " they knew not what they " were monkeying about with. I also wonder why the King's representatives did not return the Indian Empire to the original owners, the

aborigines, who were conquered by Hindu and Mohammedan. That might have made sense and a very valuable conversational counter.

When possible, I detrained and mixed with travellers, sightseers, and hawkers, who throng the platforms on the arrival of passenger trains. It is the curious custom to allow vendors of sweets, matches, cigarettes, meat, fruit, milk, tea, betel-nut, to shout their wares as they carry or wheel such commodities among passengers leaving or entering a train. Indians seldom carry food, tobacco, and drink, when travelling, and therefore rely on station markets to supply their needs. Pi dogs, deprived of leg or tail by passing trains, haunt the platforms and fight below carriages for offal. Eurasian and Indian station masters strut the platform like brigadiers, who have retreated according to plan, and even the meanest railwayman expects and receives homage from Indian travellers. But railwaymen are as tyranical towards Indians as they are servile to white passengers. The story concerning a famous general, waiting for his train, may therefore be true.

" Sir," asked an educated Indian, " are you the station master ? "

" I'm not ! " said the offended general.

" Why walk you so proudly, then ? " said the surprised Indian.

There is a peculiar smell—one can feel it at times—that permeates railway stations in India. The smell is really a stink, and seems to be composed of attar of rose, sour butter, sandal-wood, acrid tobacco, soiled linen, perspiration, fumes of sulphur matches, and the overpowering blows from third class lavatories. The latter may be said to be an achievement, not a smell. Days of cleansing by skilful dhobis (washermen) have little effect on this lingering achievement. It is the general belief that only a long sea voyage eradicates this adhesive stink from body and clothing. I may be gullible, but I refuse to believe that on returning to England, sensitive

porters have been heard to exclaim: "Phew! That bloke comes from the East."

Passengers, vendors, and idlers, expressed considerable surprise when I spoke to them. They seemed to think I was different from other white men and said so, with extravagant compliments that are so pronounced in Eastern conversation.

One youngster who came from some cantonment, where it was said to be bad form to talk the language, had the audacity to tell me that I lowered the white man's dignity when I talked with Indians. He also thought, and thought aloud, that men like myself, ought not to be allowed to enter the country. The lad took evasive action when I threatened to lock him in the lavatory for the duration of the journey.

I talked with pilgrims journeying to some holy place or sacred river. The women looked charming in coloured saris, and chatted excitedly while the children clutched at skirts and gazed at me with fearful interest in their brown eyes.

The large-bosomed, wide-beamed, good-looking Bilaspuri women were a bold lot: their sexual badinage being both informative and colourful. In exchanging snips for their snaps, these amazons often snapped before I could think of an appropriate snip. They asked if I was married—a woman's leading thought when she meets a strange man—and when I smilingly shook my head, they gigglingly declared that I was a menace to women.

"How could I be a danger among ye?" I asked. A pretty girl, who pretended to be shy, whispered coyly: "We be weak women." Judging by the light that lies in a woman's eyes—and lies—she meant me to understand that women were weak and willing.

These nomads from Bilaspur, wander about the land searching for work on railway embankments and cuttings. It was useless, therefore, to ask the girl for her telephone number. But I hoped to see more of such attractive women. A pious wish, shared by many subalterns, who also pine for opportunities showered upon, but never accepted by, missionaries.

Naked Sadhus, so-called holy men, stared at me through eyes bloodshot with drink and drugs. Beggars, thieves, and blackguards all, they terrorize women by threats of disease and misfortune, to obtain food and money. And they deputize for the fertile and infertile husband. These licentious swine seldom failed to irritate me. And because I hold that it is impossible to insult hypocritical priests, I taunted them when possible.

It interested me to watch a villainous looking Sadhu trailing an opulent woman. Irritated as usual, I spoke to him. " O Holy Thief ! " I said, " What takes thee to Benares ? Be it loot or women ? "

He talloned a naked groin with inch-long finger nails and spat contemptuously. " But for the colour of thy skin," he snarled, " my curses would cause thee to wither at my feet."

" Curse me, Thief, but before I wither, answer me."

" Men of God command and answer none ! " he shouted and limped away with begging bowl and iron-bound staff.

We parted friends.

A passing peddler whispered : " Lo koobarb ! Koobarb lo ! " (Here be spiced meat.)

" O Hadji ! " I called, " Why this whispering ? "

" Because I am old and fearful," he said softly.

" Why fearful ? There is no need for fear in such a crowded place."

" There be, sahib. As I have found and to my hurt."

" Tell me."

" Hearken, then. Being a Mohammedan, I sell meat, which is sinful to offer to Hindus. Came a day when I shouted, Lo koobarb ! Koobarb lo ! and thrust my basket containing meat into the face of a man who was seated in a railway carriage. Whereupon he leapt out and cried angrily : " Would'st offer meat to a Hindu ? Thou bhanchute ! "

He beat me about the loins with his staff till I fell to the ground. Now, not daring to offend again, I whisper as I pass. For it is not within my stomach to suffer such a beating again."

The gentle Hindu becomes a fiend when offended.

About a day's journey from Rajpur, and remote from medical help, a tragedy occurred. The kind of tragedy that happens in the East. Had I known that a white man would allow me to experiment on his wife, while the impotent fellow looked on helplessly, I'd have detrained quicker than possible.

A young English woman and her husband occupied the carriage next to mine. We were the only white passengers, and as we had not been introduced, we spoke not.

The train stopped at a watering station and the husband, overcoming his reluctance to talk to a stranger, came to my carriage and said diffidently: "Are you, by chance, a doctor?"

"I'm not," I replied. "Is someone ill?"

"Yes," he groaned. My wife seems to be very ill."

"Bad luck! Have you any idea what the trouble is?"

"No. A few days ago she complained of pain at the point of the right shoulder. The pain became worse, and she seems to be in agony now."

"Has she seen a doctor?"

"No. I'm in the Forest Service, where we seldom meet a doctor. I was not worried as I was due for long leave and we thought the voyage home would put her right."

Another's troubles are the best of introductions. I therefore stepped out and took his arm.

"I'm damned sorry! How can I help? I know what trouble and loneliness feels like. I had a belly-ful of both when stationed in the desert some years ago. Shall I join you in your carriage?"

"Please do," he said gratefully.

I looked at the prostrate girl's sallow face and the yellow whites of her eyes. And when I remembered that she complained of pain at the tip of her shoulder, I feared it was a case of liver abscess, a fairly common complaint, which even laymen are able to diagnose at times.

"Are you in pain?" I asked.

" Yes," she panted. " Are you a doctor ? "

" No. But I think I can find something to ease the pain."

They looked hopefully, unbelievingly, at me.

At the next stop, I entered a crowded third class carriage.

" Which among ye has opium ? " I demanded.

None spoke, but all looked at one another furtively.

Knowing that opium is not difficult to find, when two or three are gathered together in India, I bellowed : " Give ! or I search all and take."

" Art thou of the police ? " an old woman asked.

" Nay, mother. Have no fear. I am of the ghorra-logue (soldier-folk) not of the police."

" For what purpose do'st thou demand affim from among us ? "

"To ease a white woman's pain."

"Aree ! Because of a child on the way ? " she asked interestedly. All looked at me with sympathetic approval.

" Nay, mother. The woman suffers, because of a goalee (lump) within her."

" If other matters be in order, the goalee may well be a child, sahib." She beamed.

" Aye," the women chorused knowingly. " The goalee may well be a babe, if all else be in order."

I was not prepared to discuss other matters or lumps in women, with a crowd of knowing females. I feared to become involved in a subject that is said to cause concern among careless bachelors. But one must be patient with a kindly people, so I said, resignedly : " Be it babe or goalee, mother, it matters not. Give of thy affim for a woman suffers."

" Turn thy mind towards me, sahib," shrilled a shrewd-looking female, with beady eyes, tobacco stained fingers, and filthy garments. " A midwife am I who hast brought many men-children into the world, with these my hands. If the men-folk will depart from the white woman's presence, then, for a small sum, paid at once, I will use such arts (fierce pummelling, and brutal kneading of the abdomen, are the mildest of arts practiced by Indian midwives) as are only

known to midwives, and the babe will come forth with no more pain than be usual."

She had the sense to veil her wicked face—a face that should have been forcible veiled—when I shouted: "Chup awruth!" (Shut up, female!)

I turned to the old woman, who mistook me for a policeman. "It is not a matter of a babe, I need affim to bring relief to a woman."

"Take," she chortled, and groping among her voluminous skirts, picked a few dirty little brown pills from a small box which, among other things, contained betel-nut, cloves, and tobacco.

"How many do I give unto the woman," I asked, as I fingered the pills and wondered how potent they might be.

"Give but one to content the mind; sleep is summoned with two; and in the pain of childbirth, three or four will bring comfort."

"May thy Gods bless thee, mother!" I exclaimed gratefully and placed five rupees in her hand. "But remember, I come for more, if need arise."

"Aye," she chuckled. "At such a price, come often, and may the Gods increase thy need for affim.'

She looked triumphantly at her companions, who wished they had been less secretive when I made a general demand for the drug.

Passenger trains are seldom punctual in India. Angry travellers have been known to demand the abolition of time-tables in favour of calendars, and even the long-suffering Indian calls a fast train, lungri, the lame one. But passenger trains wait for white men.

I beckoned to the husband to join me on the platform.

"What are they?" he asked, looking at the pills.

"Opium," I said, trying to check the triumphant tone in my voice.

"Opium?"

"Yes."

"What for?"

" For your wife, of course. They will ease her pain," I explained, with the impudent assurance of a politician foretelling the past. " But, I require your permission before she swallows any."

" Why ? "

" Because I don't know a blamed thing about op . . . " Hurriedly correcting myself, I said airily : " I meant to say, I don't know a great deal about opium. It eases pain, I know, and is a habit forming drug. It also messes up the pupils of the eyes, but that wears off in time."

" How many pills may my wife take ? " he asked, looking dubiously at me.

When a girl is in trouble, he who hesitates to lie, holds the unwanted babe. A favourite maxim of mine and one I try to live up to. I therefore lied handsomely.

" Experience," I said thoughtfully : " has proved that one pill makes an excellent sedative ; a couple, if a soporific is called for ; three may be taken in cases of severe pain ; but never more than four at a time."

" By Jove ! " he exclaimed. " You Sappers seem to know a hell of a lot about everything."

The unhappy girl choked, then gulped again and again till all four pills were past return. Sometime later her body relaxed and she slept.

As I watched from the opposite bunk, her eyes twitched and ripples of pain passed across her sallow face. Low moans, accompanied by spasmodic opening and closing of her hands, indicating suffering in spite of the drug. I tried to help when she turned from side to side, but my clumsy efforts seemed to increase her suffering. In her delirium she returned to her childhood and incoherently murmured about people and places she had known. I feared greatly, but smiled confidently when the husband looked anxiously at me.

A scorching, dust-laden wind, charged with sulphuric smoke from the engine, swept through the open windows and released rivulets of sweat down faces caked with grime and lined with anxiety.

While I sat and watched, terrifying thoughts passed through my mind. Correctly administered, opium is a valuable opiate. Had I not seen Indian troops miss the target repeatedly, till a steadying shot of opium brought them on to the target? They were addicts, of course. Was the old woman an addict? If so, four opium pills meant little to her; they might well be a lethal dose to one unaccustomed to the drug.

Hell! Only a sanguinary fool interferes in anothers' trouble. How I longed for the journeys' end!

Ice was unobtainable, nor had the husband made provision for invalid food. However, I managed to find chicken and bovine extracts in refreshment-rooms, and fed the girl with a teaspoon while the husband sat with face cupped between his hands and gazed strickenly at his wife.

They were newly-married and this was the commencement of their longed for journey to England.

Some hours later, the girl sat up, gazed about wildly, vomitted, and collasped.

My heart missed a beat and my throat filled with heartache.

The sobbing man folded his arms around his dying wife, and when her bewildered eyes besought him to help her to stay, I crept away.

My eyes welled. Cinders, of course.

CHAPTER IV

The Newcomer; Is He a Sabih?; My Gigantic Chief; The Residents; A Remarkable Dinner; A Woman in Authority; Night Sounds; Instructions; Royal Passion; Gun Salutes; Someone's Pick of Women; Drink and Flattery.

THE news that a newcomer is due to arrive causes grave concern in a small station because the residents have only themselves to reply upon for their entertainment. All express their anxiety about the newcomer and the twittering at the club where the residents meet to play, drink and quarrel, is not unlike the expectant murmuring in a theatre before the rising of the curtain. The general tone of anxiety is very natural, as experience has proved that the newcomer may be a good fellow or a misanthrope. If he happens to be a good fellow he is welcomed. If not—and he may be a rattling good chap who only requires knowing—then social ostracism is his lot.

The newcomer cannot flatter himself that he is a strong silent man. English society in India admits of no compromise and strong silent men are not recognized. He must therefore accept station life with all its petty jealousy and heroism or become a pariah.

" Is he a sahib ? " is the first and vital question.

If someone happens to have met the much discussed man and hints that he is sahibish, but not quite the pucca-sahib, all sigh resignedly and prepare for the worst.

Deputy Commissioners, the powerful heads of districts, are not necessarily sahibs. Should the newcomer be the powerful head of the district and hairy-heeled, he is welcomed in spite of his common accent and uncommon manners. On the other hand, the uncouth junior is soon made to feel that he is an outsider and, unless he is very strong willed, it is only a matter of time before he drifts to women and drink.

Hairy-heeled or not, I was the newcomer who had to be put through his hoops before long. Such were my thoughts as the train slowed down for Rajpur station.

Colquhoun, my gigantic chief, met me. His face seemed to be half jaw and his handgrip felt like an accident.

" Glad to see you, young fellow. What made you late ? " he asked, looking keenly at me.

I looked at his tanned face, steady eyes, and a chin I could have hung my helmet on, and decided to make no excuse.

" I broke my journey on the way, sir."

" Petticoats ? "

" And feathers," I added.

His laugh warmed my heart.

As we entered his car, he said : " I've asked the residents to meet you at dinner to-night. Our bungalows adjoin, so come along about eightish."

Rajpur was a delightful station with metalled roads shaded by mango and neem trees. The bungalows, sited on the bank of a wide river, were surrounded by gardens watered from deep wells. But the place seemed to be haunted by the ghosts of men, women, and children, victims of the Indian mutiny and buried in the old cemetery at the fringe of the jungle. Not that that disturbed me. For I've never sensed a ghost, although my dogs have often sniffed at them in God-forsaken rest-houses.

Indian servants are treasures. When we arrived at my bungalow my servants lined up in the garden to greet me. All beamed and salaamed in order of rank. A quick look round proved that the horses had been cared for, my bath was ready, and my clothes laid out.

Then came the dogs. My bobbery-pack of hounds who had preceeded me.

Before calling to my dog-boy to release them I took a firm stance and prepared to receive cavalry.

They they came.

Yelping hysterically, they hurtled across the lawn and hurled themselves at me. Long dogs leading, small dogs racing behind, and all the doggy bottoms tucked over a confusion of legs in frenzied competition. Again and again the excited pack leapt as they tried to obtain a paw-hold on my body and fell back like waves surging down a half-tide rock.

In the general melee, small dogs nipped long dogs who were trying to find footholds on the yelping mites. No quarter was whined for by long or short.

Exhaustion ended a friendly fracas and a doggy welcome. The dogs then sat around with ears laid back, flanks quivering, and grinning jowls.

Colquhoun's guests eyed me warily as I stepped on to his verandah. The men sipping sherry and the women idling with cherry brandy—a binding drink of sweetened nastiness. I fervently hoped that the introductions would be perfunctory, but Colquhoun knew his drill and introduced me to the women in the order of their husband's rank.

Mrs Kerridge came first. She scrutinized me as an entomologist gazes at a new species of bettle, and I gathered that it was immaterial to her whether I breathed. I classed her among the egoists—those who are not interested in me. Next came Mrs O'Grady, a jolly Irish woman, with a magnificent waist and bosom. There was nothing petty about Mrs O'Grady. Even when she determined to found a family, she commenced with twins. Her twin daughters, who had

reached the disturbing age of eighteen, exclaimed impulsively how glad they were to meet me. They were pretty girls, attractively freckled, with black hair, roughly permed by the Indian barber, whose daily activities included scandal, dentistry, maltreatment of corns, probing boils, and the lucrative job of Pimp-major, fees payable in advance ; interviews by appointment.

The Twins were followed by Mrs Wazir Ali, wife of the Mohammedan Civil Surgeon. She welcomed me shyly and looked charming in a flowered silk sari.

Lastly, because she was married to a coolie-catcher—a derogatory term applied to men who recruit labour for tea-gardens—came the lovely Mrs Smith, who out-gowned all the women. She was a beautiful girl and, so far as I was able to see, she seemed to be lovely all over.

Young girls have no recognized order of precedence in society, and I came low in the scale. I therefore hoped to be paired at dinner with one of the Twins. But I was the principal guest on this occasion and Colquhoun rightly saddled me with Mrs Kerridge, the WOMAN in AUTHORITY in Rajpur.

Women in authority are not uncommon in India. If, perchance, they happen to be married to senior officials, they usurp power and humble all under their husband's jurisdiction.

The Book of Proverbs states that the four things the Earth cannot bear are : " A servant when he reigneth ; a fool when he is filled with meat ; an odious woman when she is married ; and a handmaiden when she is heir to her mistress." Had, however, that inspired Book been published after the emancipation of women, I have no doubt that a woman in authority would have been the fifth unbearable thing.

During dinner, I tried to interest Mrs Kerridge, but she ignored me when she saw me enjoying the Twins' pretty faces. Having little else to do, I rolled bread-pills and arranged them neatly round my plate. Then, warmed by food and spirited

by drink, I thought of a couple of conversational counters and hoped they might interest my disagreeable partner.

I broke a lull in the general conversation, with: " My journey was remarkably eventful."

" Really ? " she replied, stifling a yarn.

The tragedy in the train did not interest her, so I employed the other counter. " I had an unfortunate experience with a young girl," I said brightly.

" A young girl, did you say ? How interesting ! " She closed her eyes wearily.

" Interesting is hardly the correct word. I shot her ! " I exclaimed.

She opened her eyes like a surprised owl. " Shot a girl ? "

" Yes. I had to compensate the silly wench, but she then became my property. In a sense," I added.

" I don't understand."

" I'll try to explain. After wounding the girl, I stood drinks all round and thereby made peace with the villagers. The headman then fed me in a hut, but before leaving, he ordered the girl, who, by the way, was a remarkably pretty thing, to remain with me."

" Just you two ? " Mrs Kerridge's eyes narrowed.

" Of course ! But before the headman left, he winked and hoped I might find the girl amusing and amenable."

I smiled reminiscently and continued. " You can imagine what happened ! "

" I can imagine no such thing ! " she exclaimed indignantly and purged me with a look.

After dinner, Mrs Kerridge whispered her version of my tale to the other women and, if I lost my reputation, I gained much womanly interest.

The dinner was a seven course meal. Far too many, but such is the manner of living in India. A typical dinner menu may be of interest if it only helps to prove how pretentious we could be:—

Olives. Salted Almonds. Devilled Walnuts.

Clear Snipe Soup.

Fish en Aspic.

Saddle of Mutton.

Partridge á la Raja.

Iced Asparagus.

French Beans. Potato Chips. French Salad.

Banana Charlotte.

Fruit á la Chantilly.

Cheese Straws. Violet Ice. Pulled Bread.

Preserved Ginger. Prunes in Cherry Brandy.

Peaches in Brandy. Greengages in Cream.

FRUIT

Pomegranates. Liches. Mangosteen.

Pine-apples. Custard-apples. Guavas. Grapes.

WINE

Champagne. Red and White Wine.

Brandy. Cherry Brandy. Chartreuse. Kummel.

COFFEE

Turkish and French.

Cigars. Russian and Turkish Cigarettes.

Such presumptuous extravagance proved that we, who came from Upper Tooting, Portobello, Malahide, imagined, in our ignorance, that we were aping Mayfair. A misconception which is peculiar to the suburban-minded who are dazzled by the impecunious East.

I have dined and suffered with Indian, trans-frontier Chief, and once, alas, with a Catholic Priest. All were equally hospitable, but never ostentatious. The Indian set my stomach alight with chilli dishes ; the Chief nearly succeeded

in emptying that organ with the unblinking, reproachful-looking eye of a mountain sheep—a tit-bit an honoured guest dare not refuse ; and the priest fed me on the left-overs from his Eurasian parishioners mid-day meal. The scavanged feast ended with a roast something of peculiar flavour and unreasoning toughness. That, too, was a scavanger. For when I asked what the bird could have been the priest replied : " That bird will never caw again."

" That bird," was a thieving crow he shot on the eve of dinner.

Ugh ! I can still taste " that bird " and I cannot look a sheep in the eye.

After dinner, the women sat beneath the stars and talked about babes, servants, and the wicked probabilities of others, while we remained to drink, grouse, and talk shop.

Colquhoun and Peeler were single. The others, although cooped up with their wives in a small station, seemed to be reasonably happy or resigned.

O'Grady, the magistrate, a raw-boned Irishman with a brogue one could lean against, conveyed a sense of withholding weighty information, during his sober moments. A kindly man, who was known to depart from the Indian Penal Code when moved by an unfortunate litigant. He and his buxom wife radiated kindliness. When we fell sick, Mrs. O'Grady and the Twins nursed us, but it was difficult to become convalescent. In their anxiety to take no risk, the nursing trinity kept the patient in bed till sheer boredom forced him into his trousers. They then left.

Which leads to a peculiarity concerning trousers. A detrousered man is a harmless invalid ; let the harmless invalid slip into his trousers and the nurse feels it is wise to leave. I am not competent to write about women, whether within or without trousers.

Peeler, the policeman, looked like a sleuth. His grey eyes missed little and the restless energy in his slim body was usefully employed in lowering the incidence of crime. Unfortunately his wit was caustic and tongue bitter. I liked him

because he was fearless. There remained the much loved Civil Surgeon, Dr Wazir Ali, and Smith, the outcasted coolie-catcher.

If these man and women come and go, it is because that is life in India. Many of my best friends died, others were transferred or invalided out of this country, and I never met or heard of them again.

It is perhaps significant that women are forgotten when men forgather to drink, smoke, and yarn. We might have talked till dawn, had Mrs Kerridge not entered and ordered us to join the others on the lawn.

The O'Grady's promptly fell asleep, the Wazir Alis slipped away, the Twins twittered, and the others droned about gardens, leave, and life in England. Being a stranger, I was allowed to doze and listen to the night sounds. Howling pi dogs were silenced by the gruesome wails of: " Dead Hindu. Dead Hindu." from jackal across the river, while the rhythmic beat of tom-toms, synchronized with the waters gurgling over the rapids. Chirruping crickets, warbling nightjars, chittering bats, and the plaintive cry of: " Did you do it ? Did you do it ? " from distant plover, sent me to sleep.

To bid good-night and depart without delay is an achievement. Colquhoun waved me to a chair when the last of the guests had said good-night for the umpteenth time. " What do you think of them ? " he sighed.

" All, excepting Mrs Kerridge, seemed friendly," I replied.

He smiled. " She is peculiar. Peeler described her as a shrew who has been wandering through her teens for the past twenty years. She once tried to overawe Mrs Smith," Colquhoun chortled.

" What happened ? "

" When Joan called on Mrs Kerridge she was shown into the sitting-room, where Mrs Kerridge and her ayah, a particularly dark-skinned creature, were examining a dress. Mistress and servant looked up and took no notice of Joan, who stood by the door feeling embarrassed. The two women

continued to discuss alterations and then Joan spoke up. "Pardon me," said Joan sweetly, "but will one of you women kindly tell me which of you is Mrs Kerridge?"

Shortly before sunrise I strolled from my bungalow to delight in the perfume of my garden. The peculiar aroma of oleander, sweet scent of jasmine, exotic perfume of frangipani, nostalgic reminder of stock, spicy fragrance of marigold, and the indescribable wholesomeness of leaves, have their appointed time and gardens become scented calendars.

I then walked to Colquhoun's office and found him seated behind a pile of files. He pushed the files aside, fingered a few cheroots in a dilapidated box, and lit a match.

"Would you care to—puff—puff—have—puff—one? You may—puff—find—puff—puff—a good—puff—among them."

I found a good puff, sat back, and blew smoke towards the ceiling while I listened to his instructions.

He first warned me to keep my mouth shut about State affairs.

I compressed my lips.

"For instance, murder, infanticide, extortion and royal passion, may occur from time to time."

"Royal passion?" I exclaimed.

"Royal passion is known as rape, when it takes place without a palace," Colquhoun explained.

I nodded.

"The people are desperately poor," he continued.

"So I have heard."

"A man who can afford to purchase a yearly blanket is said to be well off by his neighbours."

"Phew!" I whistled.

"Poverty," said Colquhoun, quoting bitterly, "is the root of discontent, and fever is a synonym for insufficient food and clothing."

"My God!" I exclaimed. "Are the people of the States poorer than the people in British India?"

"That is a subject we try to avoid. However, does this convey anything to you? Migration from the States into

British India is negligible, but emigration from British India to the States might become a menace if unchecked."

I groaned and changed the subject.

" How many States do you control ? "

" Three, with a total area of about fifteen thousand square miles."

" Seems a lot."

" True ! But you will soon get accustomed to long journeys. I might add that all the States are governed by petty chiefs who like to be known as Rajas. None of our petty chiefs is entitled to a gun-salute when entering British India, but all would gladly surrender a portion of their harems for such an honour."

" What makes them so covetous ? "

" Because a Rajas importance is indicated by the number of explosions fired in his honour. Seven guns tells an apathetic public in British India that a minor Raja has arrived. Nineteen bangs out the news that a big-pot is making himself heard. All Rajas yearn to be big-pots and therefore strive to add a few more sulphuric explosions to their established fusillade."

" How is it done ? "

" By building schools, hospitals, and modern jails in their State. Anything, in fact, that helps to attract attention to the ruler."

" Including monastery, convent, and temple ? "

" No ! The credit for such work is scored above the line by the High Priest."

" Are our Rajas difficult to handle ? " I asked eagerly.

" Very ! And," said Colquhoun gravely, " they are prepared to dislike you."

" Why ? "

" Because yours is the spending department. Your demands on the treasury for sums to be set aside for public works is bound to make you unpopular."

" I seem to be faced by a bad start," I muttered moodily.

Colquhoun grinned. " If you possess a sense of humour, you will get away with it."

" I've heard nothing humorous so far," I replied uneasily.

" Listen to this. Some years ago I had to revoke an unjust tax. The angry Raja protested bitterly and, in an official letter he referred to himself as an over-administered old b——."

I laughed.

" You may perhaps wonder why you and I have to live in British India."

" That was a question I intended to ask."

" Had it been decided to place our headquarters in one of the States, every Raja would have clamoured for the privilege of housing us. That is the reason why we tour the States from our headquarters in British India."

" I understand. What exactly are my duties ? "

" You will be in charge of all public works. Public works include, roads, bridges, temples, canals, and dams for storage reservoirs. It will take about ten months in the year to tour all the States."

" Gosh ! " I exclaimed, appalled at the thought of such prolonged spells of loneliness.

Taking Colquhoun's advice, I agreed to purchase a box-body car with considerable road clearance and sufficiently roomy to accommodate myself, a couple of servants and our personal effects. The States provided furnished guest-houses, tents when necessary, and elephant transport in jungly areas. And, except for tinned provisions and alcohol, I was told that I could draw on the States for milk, flour, eggs, butter, chickens and bazaar groceries.

" I seem to be utterly dependent on people who are determined to dislike me," I said moodily.

" They are prepared to dislike you because of your job," he explained. He then looked keenly at me. " Just one word of warning," he said quietly.

" Yes ? "

" Women ! "

" Women ? Women ? You mean Indian women, I suppose ? "

" I do."

" How do they come into my life ? "

Colquhoun replied—primly, I thought—" I sincerely hope that you will not allow Indian women to enter into your life."

He noticed my puzzled look and said : " I'll try to explain. To commence with you must understand that the Indian cannot believe that man can be continent. Your pet weakness will soon become known and whether it be women, shooting, or alcohol, some responsible State official will make it his business to see that it is fully indulged."

" Supposing that my pet weakness is women ? " I asked chaffingly.

" In that case you will be offered someone's choice among the women in the States."

" I could not forage for myself, I suppose ? "

" Indirectly, perhaps."

" Hum ! But . . . "

" But," said Colquhoun, interrupting me, " you would not last long."

" Tell me something that I don't know," I confessed cheerfully.

" You mistake my meaning," he replied gravely. " I was not thinking of stamina when I said you would not last long. You would not last long because of blackmail. Do you imagine that in return for their charming persuasions that the Raja and his officials would not demand repayment ? "

" By charming persuasions, you mean beautiful women ? "

" Exactly ! "

" Then let me assure you that blackmail cannot frighten me. I've no money to lose."

" And allow me to assure you that the kind of blackmail I have in mind will assuredly frighten you."

" Are you serious ? "

" Very," and Colquhoun smiled grimly.

I sighed.

" I can tell you," he continued, " that in return for the pick of the women, you will be required to decrease expenditure by scamping your work. It will not be long before you become thoroughly involved and then you will be forced to obey every whim of Raja and official. And believe me when I say that petty officials can be brutally exacting when they have obtained the whip-hand over those in their power."

" Enough ! Enough ! " I cried. " Tiger seem to be safer than women. Shooting is to be my pet weakness. Are there any further snags in this job ? "

" Lots ! But three will be sufficient to commence with."

" Tell me," I groaned.

" Drink is one snag."

" Drink has no fears for me."

" Not when you are lonely for months on end ? "

" Even so," I said firmly. " What's the second snag ? "

" Intrigue."

" Why should intrigue affect me ? Mine is a straightforward job."

" Because nothing can be said to be straightforward in the States. For instance, all the overseers and surveyors are your subordinates, but they are paid by the States. Therefore your subordinates, as servants of the States, will be expected to earn their wages by lowering the cost of all public works. Further, your ability will be questioned ; estimates challenged ; and when you have succeeded in overcoming every possible method of obstruction, you will find it extraordinarily difficult to obtain the necessary labour for your work. But," and Colquhoun ended on a cheerful note, " I feel sure that you will, in time, get accustomed to State intrigue."

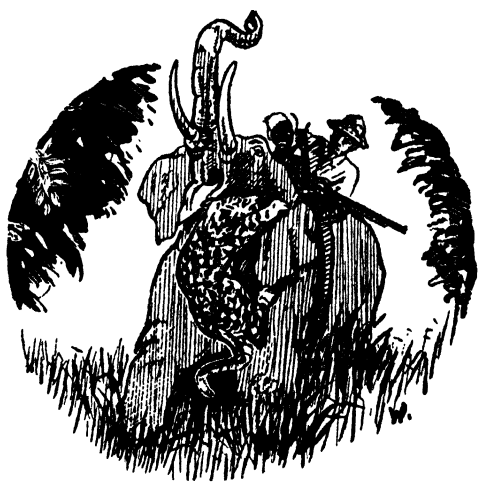
" Is there much more that will require getting accustomed to ? " I asked despondently.

" Yes ! An insidious weapon called flattery. You will have to try to avoid being swayed by flowery compliments. The Indian excels in flattery and I am prepared to bet that there is not a man in this station who has not been flattered

into believing that he is beloved by all Indians. India also extols the white man as she promotes him in rank. An artizan becomes a gentleman and a gentleman is raised to the aristocracy. I warn you that unless you are more than usually level-headed, it will not be long before you become as vain as," and he pointed at himself, " a Political Agent."

But Colquhoun was a remarkable man. He was, in fact, uncommonly unassuming in a land where Political Agents are confounded with the Creator.

I was told that when Colquhoun returned from a motoring tour on the Continent, he promptly removed the G.B. plate from the back of his car.



CHAPTER V

Indian States; State Officials; Watched!; Aborigines; Bowels; An Allowance of Women; Have a Go!; Women Beaters; An Elephant on Points; A Mauled Girl; An Appointment with Fear; An Unwanted Girl.

WHENEVER Colquhoun and I visited the States we were accompanied by a bodyguard of twelve Gurkhas in command of a Gurkha sergeant. The purport of the guard was to uphold the dignity of the Political Agent, to protect him from a friendly people, and to prevent a friendly people from breaking into the guest-house in order to rob and slay either of us.

The bodyguard was a State joke.

At the State border we were met by the Raja perched on the tallest elephant and by those of his officials who were able

to purloin or borrow similar mounts. As we got out of our cars, the elephants trumpeted and the Raja and his officials slid down and waddled toward us.

The opening ceremony then followed. His Highness blew the first kiss by salaaming to the ground and he was followed in correct salaaming order by the Prime Minister, the Chief of Police, and the Chief Medical Officer.

All were Indians, of course.

The customary polite greetings were followed by the customary lying competition by both sides. We informed the Raja how much we had fretted about his health and coupled our anxiety with grave concern in regard to the present and future condition of the ladies in the palace.

The fair sex could not be ignored, because India allows of no compromise in matters pregnant.

Our feeling enquiries about the Raja's health was accepted as a challenge by the Medical Officer. He hastened to assure us that the miserable looking dyspeptic was in the pink, even if his wan smile belied medical optimism. A casual reference to the condition of the crops put the Prime Minister on guard. Abundant crops were invariably followed by demands on the treasury for additional sums to be spent on public works. The Prime Minister therefore declared, most emphatically, that the crops were barely worth harvesting. A glib lie that the eye could refute on the spot. Then came the Chief of Police. He had the effrontery to claim that all crime ceased soon after his appointment.

When all who mattered had expressed their oriental fulsomeness and well rehearsed lies, we spoke of our devotion to one another and hoped we might live to a great age and spend that great age together. In fretful companionship, I suppose. We then girded up our loins—a necessary precaution before mounting an elephant—and were prepared for the journey to the guest-house.

Colquhoun, the Raja, and I, shared an elephant and off we went, swaying rhythmically, like chorus girls. But unlike chorus girls, who flicker about, we kept station at

correct elephant intervals in order to advertise the recognized social position of every member of the mammoth parade.

All roads led through the bazaar and through that plague area of flies, filth, and cow-byres, we swayed along to the tune of reed instruments, howling dogs, and yelling boys, who hampered progress and endangered our necks by turning cartwheels beneath the elephants.

Journeys end was the guest-house. On our arrival the bodyguard presented arms, the Union Jack, bent by unskilful hands, crept up the flag-staff like a hesitating mouse, and the bugler sounded a blast that seemed strangely reminiscent of the Last Post.

Finally, with sighs of relief, intended to convey the sorrowful sounds of parting, the Raja and his troupe swayed away. But I thought I heard the Raja whisper: "That was a fair something, that was."

Alone at last! Except, of course, for a residue of small boys who climbed trees and described our activities by yelling to their companions below. Then it was that Colquhoun and I became the subjects of a running commentary combined with a marionette performance.

One brat's vivid description lingers still in my memory.

"Lo, brothers!" he shouted. "I see him. He cannot escape mine eye. As I watch, he sits in the water in which he hath cleansed his body. And what a body, brothers! White, where spared by the sun. Armed with the bones of an ox. And hairy as far as the eye can see. Aree! I look closely and what do I see? Remaining in the water, he secures a coloured bone (toothbrush) and thrusts the same within his mouth. He now spits with violence. Again and again doth he spit. How that man can spit! What now do I see? What I see is unbelievable! Does he spare his face? Nay! Even as I watch he thrusts his face within the water he sits in. And that water, brothers, is filthy beyond words!"

I bowed my head with shame when I heard: "How

unclean the man is! How very unclean!" shouted from below.

There were times when I had to break from Colquhoun and the social functions in the States. When with Colquhoun, I had to endure public banquets, dine with Raja and official, watch interminable nautches, listen to Shakespearian plays in Hindi, and help to entertain our visitors in the guest-house. Our visitors were invariably shy. They only called because they had to. They never knew when it was time to leave and sat on the edge of chairs, looking miserable and tight-lipped, till dismissed by the customary: "Thou hast permission to depart."

It became irksome to be on one's best behaviour all day and every day. To say the right thing to the right people, to be able to recognize the right people to whom the right thing ought to be said, to listen to lies, to pretend to believe lies, and to try to look cheerful when feeling utterly bored. We lived in limelight and all that happened, even in the privacy of our bedrooms, soon became known.

I remember being dosed with ipecacuanna when touched by dysentery. Ipecacuanna is difficult to retain, so I rose from my bed and rushed to the verandah. The watchful sentry shouted and the bodyguard tumbled out and presented arms while I vomited. But our ever-present bodyguard could be relied upon to do their duty at all times. Had we entertained women in the guest-house, our bodyguard would, without doubt, have presented arms to purposeful prostitute or fortuitous flapper on their arrival and departure. Assuming, of course, that p.p. and f.f. obtained "our permission to arrive" and obeyed "our permission to depart."

When it became necessary to leave Colquhoun in order to inspect outlying work, my life became lonesome and my outlook lemoncholy. It was then that I decided to get to know the Bhils (pronounced Beels) an aboriginal people who inhabited the jungles. I turned to the Bhils, in preference to the villagers, because they were not infected by the vicious propaganda preached by scheming agitators. Wheat, rice,

and maize may not be exported till the needs of the States have been fulfilled, but the agitators made the ignorant villagers believe that the prohibition of exports was the cause of their abject poverty.

Although it is said to be " bad form " to cultivate the friendship of Indians, I preferred to be rich among the poor rather than be poor among the rich, I therefore decided to gain the affections of a friendly people and take the risk of being disliked by my own kind.

It was a wise decision.

The Bhils welcomed me extravagantly and taught me much about the jungles, their superstitions, and peculiar customs. Some of the information was gleaned from a notorious little Bhil, named Varnia, who became my friend and slave, and some from chance acquaintances, who were not always masculine.

I offer no explanation, but I believe that one cannot become initimate with an aboriginal people unless one rubs shoulders with their women. To rub shoulders was as far as I was prepared to go, but one rub leads to another, and I soon learnt to be circumspect among women who have few inhibitions and expect to meet with none.

Platonic love is unknown among the Bhils.

To know the Bhil, is to like him. For who can dislike a cheerful, fearless, generous little savage, who has the making of an affectionate father, when sober, and a faithful husband, when untempted by village maidens ?

Only the Bengali, that fearful race of quilldrivers, dislikes the Bhil. The Bengali maintains that the " Bhil is savage and intractable. When a Bhil meets you, he shoots you in the back with an arrow and throws your body in a ditch. Thus you may know the Bhil."

But Bengalis seldom venture into the jungles. And ditched Bengalis tell no tales. I therefore claim that the Bengali knows not the Bhil.

The majority of Bhils live in scattered huts set in jungle clearings. They cultivate tiny patches of land hard won

from dense forest and heavily timbered hills. Their system of cultivation is primitive and barely yields sufficient for their needs, but the jungle abounds with game, edible roots and fruit, such as yams, arrowroot, wild mango, and the seeds of bamboo. They also distil liquor from the blossom of the mhowa tree. Unarmed, except for axes, bows and arrows, they trap game and poison fish.

My first experience with Bhils was when a party of semi-naked little savages sat beside me while I was fishing.

An hour passed, no one spoke and not a fish nibbled.

The men lost patience and, as they rose to depart, a Bhil emptied his mind.

Which means he became candid or bloody rude.

" A few moons ago," he said, " a white man collected all the fish from this river far more quickly than I can speak the story."

" How so ? " I asked.

' Had he not wisdom concealed in his head ? " said the impertinent fellow.

" Unlike Bhils," I grunted and my jest met with yells of laughter.

The impertinent fellow then said : " The white man set alight to a small black stick and threw it into the water. Whereupon the waters rose mightily and all the fish died around him."

The white man had fished with dynamite.

Bhils believe, and it may be true, that the bowel and not the heart is the centre of emotion. I was inclined to agree because my bowels are disturbed by affection, fear, and grief. But a doubt crept into my mind one morning when I sat in my bath and sang :

Sweet, thou hast trod on a bowel.
Pass ! There's a world full of men,
And women as fair as thou art,
Must tread on mans' guts now and then.

The bowels of a Bhil maiden may be moved by a melting declaration, such as : " I place my bowel at your feet,

darling." But I wonder what an English girl's reactions would be if her lover reminded her that their "two guts beat as one." And how would she respond to: "If I am bowelbroken, its because you are bowelless."

Varnia, the Bhil, who became my friend and slave, was a respectable family man till he fell in love with three married women. It was springtime. A time when the aboriginal bowel rumbles lightly with sounds of love.

One dark night, Varnia crept from his hut and absconded with the three desirable women. He had the sense to know that deprived husbands commit murder for far less provocation than wife-pilfering and he therefore housed himself and his women in a well-provisioned and inaccessible cave.

Soon after his matrimonial triumph, three angry men demanded a word or two with me as I rode through Varnia's village.

"I speak for the others," said the angry spokesman.

"And I listen," I replied as I threw a leg across the saddle to ease an aching crutch.

"Trouble has come among us," growled the angry spokesman.

"Is the trouble shaped like unto Varnia?" I asked and checked the birth of a smile.

"Aye! Has he not taken three women? And may he not take more?"

"But Varnia is no longer young and he cannot cope with more," I said reassuringly.

"Of that we are doubtful. If Varnia is able to enjoy four women of his own and three of ours, why should he not be able to cope with more?"

And that was when I first got to know that Varnia possessed a wife and three keepsakes.

"Aye," moaned a bereft husband, "why not more?"

"Varnia," said a semi-widower, "is like unto one of our bulls, choosing here and choosing there among the herd. Moreover," he added feelingly, "wives are not easily procurable."

" Except by Varnia, it seems." A jesting remark from me that provoked nervous smiles from the afflicted and anxious looks from the onlookers.

" We dare not venture near where Varnia lives for he is evil of temper and quick with an arrow," said the spokesman.

" What then ? " I asked and waited for an answer.

" If thou wilt fire thy ' riffle ' into the cave he lives in, Varnia wilt come out with fear in his heart."

" Aye," the others whispered excitedly, " Varnia wilt assuredly come out."

" And then ? "

All fingered their arrows.

" But," I argued, " thy women are also to blame. Why therefore should I assist thee to slay Varnia and leave the women to go free ? "

" Women are of no account," said a cynical husband. " Do they not change husbands as they remove their garments ? Procure Varnia, I say, and leave us to deal with the women."

I refused to take a part in hot-blooded murder and, as I rode away, I heard the men say : " Aree ! Aree ! What man in this village can be said to be safe from Varnia ? "

Varnia, the charmer, was a greater menace than a man-eating tiger, for even the hungriest tiger is content with one woman at a time.

But as is the custom of the jungle, Varnia was forgiven when he tired of three women in a cave and returned the tiresome wenches to their husbands, with suitable gifts.

Some months later, I again came across the much loved, much feared, adulterer and I cannot remember whether I took to him or if he, like so many of my dogs, adopted me. Nevertheless I own that I liked the cheerful, fearless little savage who invariably accompanied me whenever I ghoomed (wandering, in India, bumming about, in America) the jungles surrounding his village. His wizened face looked like the bark of a tree and his beady eyes, sallowed by drink and fever, missed nothing in the jungle. A whisp of cloth

was his only garment and it served as a tobacco pouch, handkerchief, and loin-cloth.

Varnia was married and, like others, who are not necessarily Bhils, he possessed more than one attraction. As I got to know him worse and worse, I also became known to his wife, two assistant wives, and an attractive, fully-fashioned little jungle minx whom he named Ghunna or Sugarcane. It was difficult to find any reason who so many women were fond of a man who was not over-clean and born, so it was said, on the wrong side of the blanket.

A kindly euphemism for illegitimacy.

Varnia's allowance of a wife, two assistant wives and an understudy, should have been more than sufficient, but the insatiable fellow seldom passed a village without challenging the girls to come out and meet a man who was open to offers.

On one occasion I spoke severely to the little man.

" Varnia," I said reproachfully, " why challenge women when four to thine own cheek should be sufficient ? "

He replied : " And why not, sahib ? Must not the tree be shaken ere the fruit fall ? "

The incorrigible little man once tried to tempt me when we were camped beside a village containing a remarkably pretty brown eye or two.

" Cannot thou persuade thy feet to wander beside her feet in the jungle," he whispered.

He was referring to a bold young hussy who volunteered to cook for us.

" When one brave hero fans another's fire," it was time, I thought, that both brave heroes talked about other matters. I therefore told him that I was not interested in visions of tangled feet and preferred to hear him speak of the jungle.

Nothing in the jungle seemed to be hidden from Varnia. His long-range sense of smell was uncanny and his eyes were seldom deceived by the protective colouring of insect, bird, and beast. Animal tracks held no secrets. A quick

glance told him that the tracks were fresh and worth following up or stale and not worth consideration.

But certain human-like footprints scared the little man. They were the tracks of Churels. And Churel tracks lead to graveyards, the spiritual homes of these much dreaded influences. Because of his colour, Varnia could not turn pale, but his mouth drooped and his eyes stretched with fear when confronted with the footprints of a Churel. It cost a lot in liquor and patience before I managed to persuade Varnia to speak of these graveyard haunting, vindictive spirits.

" Churels are evil and turn a man's bowels unto water with fear," he whispered and shivered fearfully as he crouched over the camp fire.

Varnia had drunk a great deal, but no quantity of liquor could banish his dread. And, because fear is contageous, I, too, whispered : " What are Churels ? "

Before he could reply, Varnia lowered a mouthful of courage, distilled from the mhowa blossom, a potent spirit, smelling strongly of mice and sweaty men. Lots of mice and men.

" There be two kinds of Churels," he explained. " Some are the spirits of women who died on the day of childbirth ; others are the spirits of women who died within forty days thereafter."

The little man glanced over his shoulder towards the jungle and steadied his nerves with another mouthful of mice and men.

He whispered : " Churels are dangerous because they are shaped like beautiful women and they beckon. I ask thee, sahib, what proper man can refuse a beautiful woman who beckons ? It is that which makes them so dangerous to men."

" But," I said, " if a proper man refuses a lovely Churel, how then can she harm him ? "

Varnia looked wonderingly at me. " The man who can refuse a beautiful woman is not born. Churels," he added, " also haunt men who caused their conception."

Which seems fair, I thought.

" And," he continued warningly, " much haunting, removes desire in man. Thus does a Churel revenge herself upon the man who caused her conception and death."

" But," I argued, " supposing the Churel was a bold girl who was responsible for her condition. Would she haunt the man, seeing that he was not wholly at fault ? "

" Without doubt ! She would also haunt his male children."

" Bloody unfair ! " I exclaimed. " But why ? "

" Because women are jealous and without reason."

" Can it be said, then, that only men and male children are haunted by Churels ? " I asked, and turned aside to avoid the prodigious belch he released without warning.

Varnia was an all-in-belcher.

" Nay, sahib. Churels also haunt the surviving wife (co-wife) and bring about her death."

" Can nothing be done to prevent women from becoming Churels ? "

" Aye. The toes are secured with fibre, and bamboo pegs are driven through the finger nails of women who might become Churels and are about to die. But," he sighed resignedly, " who can tell if women are good or bad before death ? It is in my mind that if men are to be preserved from Churels, all women should be so treated before death."

" Cannot men distinguish between Churels and beautiful women ? " I asked.

" Undoubtedly ! " Churel's feet are placed back to front."

I was about to say : " If a Churel's feet are placed the wrong way, there should be no difficulty in spotting these dangerous spooks, when Varnia said dismally : " What proper man looks at a beautiful woman's feet ? "

While Varnia, overcome by mice and men, dozed, I replenished the fire and thought of the girls I had come across during my jungle ghoomings. I seldom looked at a woman's feet when there was so much that deserved a peep or two.

Might not some have been Churels? How about that attractive girl who was gathering bhêl fruit? And that equally attractive woman who quenched my thirst?

The fruity girl was a dainty suggestion who made my mind water. For that is how good-lookers, clothed in short skirts and tight fitting brassières, affect me.

"Take," she said and offered me a glutinous bhêl apple, said to be a cure for dysentery. "Such fruit," she wheedled, "benefits an uneasy stomach."

"If my stomach is uneasy, it is because I have not eaten," I replied and declined the apple.

"Nay, sahib. Worry and not hunger, causes a man's stomach to murmur. So put away thy wife for awhile."

"Alas, I have no wife."

"Put away thy woman, then."

"There be no woman."

Having cleared the field of possible rivals, she smiled and said: "Eat but a little, for bhêl makes a man like unto a tiger, bold and full of vigour."

"I am such as man without the aid of thy fruit," I bragged.

"Alas," she whispered and looked coyly at the ground, "I am but a weak girl whom no man favours."

I'm no cheat, but had I been sickening with dysentery, I'd have nibbled at that apple.

For fear of becoming benighted, I was hurrying to my camp and came on a tiny hut set in a jungle clearing. A comely young woman, who was standing beside the hut, asked if I felt thirsty.

I handed her my empty water-bottle.

"Rest awhile," she suggested, after I had again emptied the bottle.

"I may not, for even now it darkens," I replied.

"What fear hast thou of the dark, sahib?"

"None!" I lied.

"Rest then, and I will prepare food for thee." She seemed anxious about my welfare.

I was unable to find my way in the dark, and a man-eating panther frequented these jungles, so I had to speak the truth.

I looked guiltily at her and faltered: "I fear to remain."

She mistook my meaning. "Fear not," she whispered and smiled confidingly. "My man is gone to collect a debt and cannot return ere sunrise."

I told her that I seldom slept where I drank and hurried away before it became dark.

"The female of the species is far bolder than the male," is equally true among animals. In time of danger, the hind and not the stag, leads the herd. And as for that sneaking assassin, the tiger, he creeps behind his mate, when danger threatens.

Among certain Bhil tribes, the women will not allow their men-folk to beat for big game. They maintain that driving dangerous animals from cover entails risks which men should not incur. Beating is therefore undertaken by women, and they make better beaters than the men. Unlike men, who advance in detached groups, women work forward in line, and only bunch together when tiger or panther have to be held or threaten to break back. Then, judging by the shrieks of laughter, yells of derision, and appalling language, women seem to look upon beating as a great game.

I saw a lone woman shift an angry tiger skulking in a narrow ravine. The daring girl stood on a bank overlooking the ravine and threw stones at the surly beast. As I closed towards her, I heard her shout: "Out! I say. Out! Out, thou yellow cat, or I will descend upon thee with a stick," and thud went a stone. "Sulky, art thou? I have a cure for such sulkiness," and thud went another stone. "Aree? Take this, thou snarling cat." A handful of pebbles moved the angry brute, who could have streaked up the bank and put an end to the quarrel with one mighty swipe.

The plucky girl earned the skin, claws, fat, and whiskers. I kept the collar-bones, for luck.

On another occasion, a determined panther broke back

and tried to intimidate the approaching women with short rushes and menacing snarls. The women continued to advance and countered by beating tin cans, with foul oaths, and snatches of lewd song. The brute then tried an outflanking move, but other women closed in with shrieks of delight and headed him in the right direction.

His was a magnificent skin.

The courageous girls received double wages and all the products, but one.

I kept the collar-bones, for more luck.

Like the sacred cow, the products of tiger or panther are five. They should, I think, be named by-products. For either beast has to be very dead before they can be recovered. The skin makes an excellent rug; the fat cures rheumatism; the claws are symbols of bravery; the collar-bones—each bone is not unlike the half of a chicken's wishbone in shape and size—bring luck; and the whiskers bring death to unwanted wife, disloyal friend, or hated enemy, if finely divided and placed in food.

Soon after these women risked their lives in driving dangerous game under my instructions, I purchased an elephant from one of our Rajas on points, and became involved in a terrible tragedy. My elephant's points were a poor pair of tusks, good paces, and staunchness. Which means he would face a tiger and run away from a small dog. Chand Murat or Moon face, was cheap for his size and weight. He worked out at about one and nine per mammoth pound—the price of steak and onions. Apart from his value per grilled pound, his reputation for staunchness, if it proved to be true, was worth his weight in one and ninepences. But staunchness in animals, like courage in man, is relative, and depends upon the physical condition at the critical moment. Such has been my experience of others. In my own case, I have to admit that the critical moment usually occurred when I felt far from well or out of condition.

I was anxious to try out my new toy, Chand Murat, and when His Baseness, the Raja—I cannot write, His Highness—

invited me to a shoot, I accepted with considerable misgiving, because petty chiefs kill royally and without regard to sex.

I sensed trouble when we arrived.

The shoot was over, so it seemed, for the women beaters were collected around the Raja and his Diwan, and appeared to be profoundly dejected.

" What's wrong ? " I shouted, as Chand Murat lowered me to the ground on his trunk.

" His Highness," said the Diwan, " wounded a panther, but it rushed back into the jungle. He then ordered the beaters to reassemble and beat the panther back again."

" God ! " I exclaimed.

" Unfortunately," he continued, " the panther refused to move and mauled or killed one of the beaters."

" What else could you expect ? " I asked angrily.

" It was the will of the Gods," he replied sulkily.

" Where is the girl now ? "

" We do not know. The beaters dare not enter the jungle to search for fear the panther may be alive."

" But the girl may be alive too ! "

The Diwan shrugged his shoulders. She was only a woman, possibly a girl, and therefore unwanted.

" What do you intend to do ? " I asked. I wanted to strike the callous brute.

" His Highness is very upset and intends to return to the palace. I will accompany him, as is my duty to my king," he added.

The law of the jungle holds that wounded animals must be followed up and put to death in order to free them from prolonged pain, and to safeguard those who enter the jungle on their lawful occasions. But some petty chiefs are devoid of feeling and seldom subscribe to the law of the jungle although jungle law is rampant in many States.

As soon as the Royal Bastard left, disturbing thoughts passed rapidly through my mind. Something had to be done at once. And, because of the colour of my skin, I knew

that the surrounding women expected me to do that something. The girl had to be rescued, if alive; her body had to be recovered, if dead. Chand Murat might face an angry panther, perhaps, and the mahout might, perhaps, steady Chand Murat. There then remained the only unknown quality—myself.

The critical moment was near and I was not feeling too well.

I may be composed of smothered fears, but when surrounded by admiring women I am capable of extraordinary heroism, which psychiatrists confound with sex or a gland named adrenal.

Sex or gland, I was determined to do or die.

Chand Murat was saddled with a pad, a mattress-like, precarious perch, off which I might have been spilled, but for a stout rope passed across my thighs and secured below the elephant's belly.

I then became as one with my elephant.

The mahout, Khuda Bux or God's Gift, took his seat on Chand Murat's neck, with his legs tucked behind a pair of elephantine ears.

Both knights, black and white, were then ready to zig-zag toward a maiden in dire distress. A brief display of ostentatious bravery was expected of us, so while I fingered my rifle nonchalantly, God's Gift brandished his goad and called upon Allah to produce forty ruddy panther, all of which, he declared impiously were, D.V. or not, as good as dead.

A few anxious girls led us to the blood-trail and retired after chanting many earnest prayers for our future. One sweet child implored me to take care of myself. I smiled wanly and assured her that I would try to do so if only for her sake. She bent her pretty neck and blushed becomingly.

The panther's agony, blooded on sand, leaves, and rank grass was not difficult to follow, but Chand Murat soon sensed the difference between an ordinary jungle amble and a nerve-racking undertaking. He smelt the blood and yawed like a ship in a following sea and had to be coaxed or steered

toward the dreaded direction. Every partridge that rose at our feet or hare that scurried by, brought my rifle to my shoulder and dried my mouth with fear.

In areas where the trail became faint, we proceeded by trial and terror and our progress was slow. At such times I cursed God's Gift and he looked at me like an unjustly punished pup.

While I was peering anxiously ahead, Chand Murat halted and drummed at the ground with a forefoot. I longed to be back among skirts and safety, but my white skin let me down and I urged God's Gift to push on.

" I feel like one who is already dead," he whispered as he drove the goad at Chand Murat's ear.

The unhappy mammoth surged forward and opened the first round.

" Hurry ! Hurry ! " a woman screamed from a patch of jungle directly ahead.

" By Allah ! " exclaimed God's Gift.

" God ! " I cried.

" Go ! " yelled God's Gift as he goaded the elephant's ear.

In went Chand Murat and out came the Spotted Fury.

I heard the grass swish and felt Chand Murat swerve, but God's Gift obstructed my view and Chand Murat shook off the panther, about turned and bolted. The terrified elephant crashed through saplings and bent them about our ears. He avoided the larger trees, but we were whipped by branches. Bamboo clumps tore our clothes and combed our bodies. He plunged down nullahs and breasted the steep slopes. Narrow ravines were taken in a stride and ant heaps crumbled beneath his weight. I was secured to the pad, but my acrobatics equalled my companion's contortions. Tied by the legs, I twisted from side to side while he bent both fore and aft, in our frantic endeavours to avoid low-lying branches. The fear of being smashed by overhanging timber became merged with the fear of being rolled upon should our maddened elephant trip and fall. There seemed

to be no reason why Chand Murat should ever come to a halt. When in the mood and on the move, elephants travel for days, and ours was a young beast and thoroughly scared. One fact was clear. Neither I nor my companion could continue our exhausting contortions indefinitely. It was only a matter of time before we were swept away by a low branch or looped off by a trailing vine. Our fear of the panther was gone and we no longer hankered for an audience of women. We might have been carried into the adjoining State had Chand Murat not crashed into a deep ravine with precipitous walls. God's Gift then unloosed me and we took stock of our injuries.

" What now ? " he asked.

I glanced at my bloody skin—real blood—and once again my bloody white skin let me down.

" Back, of course," I replied in a voice that sounded like mine.

" So be it," said he and tied me on again.

As we came near the place from where we retreated so ignominiously, I whispered : " This time curb thy elephant, for it is not within my stomach to make such a perilous journey again with thee."

God's Gift grunted indignantly.

A moment before we were put to flight for the second time, the mauled girl again screamed for help.

But Chand Murat was tired and God's Gift managed to pull him up after a short run.

" The panther," God's Gift panted, " lies concealed in the grass near unto the girl. Wherefore the elephant wilt face him not."

" We must seek another road, then," I replied.

" All roads lead unto death, sahib."

I tried to collect my trembling wits.

" If," I said, " thou and thy elephant wilt advance toward the panther, I will—"

" Without thee, I fear to go," he protested.

" Fool !" I exclaimed, " I will be near, but not with thee."

" Where ? " he asked anxiously.

His monosyllable conveyed more meaning than a spate of words.

I then explained my plan.

" Whilst thou and the elephant advance with much noise toward the panther I will run in the same direction, but at a little distance from thee. The panther will hear me not because of the noise and I will not be seen because of the jungle. When he rushes out to attack the elephant, he will meet his death by my rifle."

" May Allah preserve thee, sahib. But forget not that I will be alone and unarmed."

" And forget not, O mahout, that I will be alone and on the ground."

" So be it," he whispered resignedly.

" Remember this before we part," I said earnestly. " When near unto the panther, hold thy elephant, for then will be the time of my greatest peril."

" On my head be it, sahib."

The Indian is without equal at such times.

The wounded panther had not the strength to attack Chand Murat and I am prepared to believe that he welcomed the bullet that ended his suffering.

We collected a number of women beaters, who placed the mauled girl, aged about fourteen, on a bamboo litter and carried her to the State hospital.

Never was a Bhil waif better cared for, but she became my problem-child. Her friends and relatives visited her in the hospital, but all left before sunset—the time when the panther's spirit entered her torn body. I wondered what the future held for a girl who became a panther at night. Even prostitution seemed to be out of the question. Who would dare to sleep with a girl and wake in the arms of a panther ?

Soon after she recovered I told the Raja that he ought to

provide for her as he was responsible for her condition. After some cogitation and, because it cost him nothing, he placed her in charge of an outlying resthouse near-by her village. She became a much-courted girl, but I was *told* that she often complained of lonely nights.

CHAPTER VI

Temples; An Anxious Prime Minister; Pacified Aborignies; Curried Pups; An Impertinent Priest; A Warning; A Terrible Goddess; Cursed by the Gods; Holy Plants; A Deputation; The Gods Retire.

WHILE I was responsible for the planning and construction of State undertakings—a pleasant pastime—Colquhoun controlled the activities of kinglets and their satellites—a soul destroying work. State undertakings included the building of temples, a work I loathed, because the all-powerful priests forced the treasury to allocate to places of worship, sums set aside for essential works, such as roads, hospitals, and irrigation. Had temples served to ameliorate the condition of the people, and not housed corpulent priest and fancy, I would not have demurred. The

former were usually shrewd business-men who confused the people by confounding piety and wealth; the latter were always good-looking young witches—I refrain from a more descriptive term—who fattened with the church. Although I had little in common with malevolent priests, I refused to believe in their hypnotic power till I earned their displeasure and suffered exceedingly.

My appreciation of priests commenced on the night I sat in my tent and studied the plan of a temple. The ornate design, disfigured by obscene carvings, was intended to be built on a low hill overlooking an extensive valley amidst delightful surroundings. As I looked at the plan, I noticed narrow passages leading to small dark rooms intended for devotional purposes, perhaps. Alcoves for incense, stone couches, and platforms for phallic worship, completed the furnishing. The bare plan produced an errie feeling, but when I thought of what might happen in those dark rooms, I felt disinclined to continue with the work.

While I gazed at the plan, a slight sound disturbed me. I looked out and saw the whites of many eyes reflected by the light of the lantern.

Ruddy priests, I thought. "What do you want?" I asked, and six aged Bhils stepped into the light, after placing their bows and arrows on one side and within reach.

Bhils usually nudge one another, hoping the other will speak, but these men were troubled. The oldest man said: "Why doest thou desire to build a temple among us?"

"No such desire is within me. The matter is one for thy priests," I explained.

"But 'tis known that thy will carries far," he whined ingratiatingly.

"What would ye have me do?"

"Build not the temple, but cause the valley to be filled with water, as thou hast done for others. Then will our crops be secured against drought, and no priest will be present to devour all we possess."

An excellent suggestion, I thought. A storage dam would

put an end to the temple project and the fear of famine. I told the deputation to depart and see me later.

They arrived on the following morning with a lovely little jungle cock, which I freed when told it was intended to be sacrified to propiate the gods. The men squatted on their hunkers and prayed while I worked on an ordinance map. A couple of hours of calculation proved that the suggested scheme was practicable and the men trooped away jubilantly. I then wrote to the Diwan and stated, somewhat arbitrarily, I fear, that the temple project was cancelled in favour of a storage reservoir.

That was the commencement of my trouble.

A few days later, a runner arrived at my camp with a letter from the Diwan. He wrote: "I am consternated to hear of the total abandonment of the highly religious temple project. The priests are flabbergasted and all of a pother. I therefore pray to your honour to reverse your most arbitrary decision and save me from fearful botheration by priest and suchlike. I fear greatly for myself, and for you, if the requisite plan is not immediately consummated."

The Diwan's warning should have been taken seriously, but I smiled at his Babu-English, and got on with the work.

Days passed in surveying the land, and I forgot about temple, priest, and Diwan, till one afternoon when I lunched beneath a tree. As I prepared to tackle some curried pups —my cook's pronunciation of curried puffs—a barefooted priest, draped in saffron, appeared from nowhere and stood before me. Thinking he was on his way to some distant shrine, I said politely: "Sit and rest, O holy One. If thou art thirsty, my Brahmin servant will fetch water."

When we say thank you, the Indian salaams, but this good-looking, arrogant young man stared at me insolently and said contemptiously: "Brahmins are forbidden to drink with the unclean."

Gratutious rudeness raises all that is bad in me. I therefore glared at him and fulminated: "Begone, thou bastard

priest or I thrust down thy throat a portion of the son of a bitch which is concealed within my basket of food."

A wave of nausea rippled across his face and I thought he was about to be sick. " I go," he said sulkily and disappeared in a nearby clump of grass.

About an hour later, he returned and found me smoking my pipe. " What now ? " I asked.

" I—have—much—to—say," he replied, emphasizing each word.

" And I have neither the time nor the stomach to listen to one who is bereft of manners."

" Listen, sahib," he continued earnestly, " for I bear a message from the High Priest of the temple devoted to Kali."

I knew something about the temple devoted to Kali. Picturesquely situated on the bank of a river, the daily sacrifice of goats polluted the waters and sickened all who were not Hindus. Moreover, it was also a fashionable temple, with powerful priests and a wealthy clientele whose daughters felt unmarried unless the ceremony is performed by High Priest, Deacon, and a Learner or two. (No description of Kali could surpass that depicted by Sir Cecil Walsh, the eminent Chief Justice of Allahabad in India. " Kali is the Goddess of Destruction. Her Idol is black, with four arms and red palms to the hands. Her eyes are red, and her face and breasts are besmeared with blood, her hair is matted, and she has projecting fang-like teeth between which protrudes a tongue dripping with blood. She wears a necklace of skulls, her earrings are dead bodies, and she is girded with serpents. She stands on the body of Siva (Siva is the great God, Lord of Life and Death) as emblematical of the male whose blood she has sucked."

Sir Cecil might have added that a gigantic Indian stands before Kali's shrine, during festivals, and tears the throats of bleating kids with his teeth. Covered with blood flowing from his mouth, he throws the dying kid on the steps leading to the shrine and seizes another and another kid from the worshippers. One such giant, it is said, has been known to

destroy more than a thousand kids per day with his powerful jaws.

Such was the Lady, whose servant, the High Priest, wished, so I was told, to get into touch with me.

I tried to look unconcerned and asked the young priest to repeat his master's message.

" The High Priest commands thee to proceed with the work of the temple forthwith," he replied truculently.

" Return then to thy master and tell him that the work on the dam, not the temple, will proceed forthwith," I said angrily.

" Shall I tell him that such are thy last words ? " he asked quietly.

" Aye ! "

" Ponder, sahib," he said persuasively, " and forget not that the temple is desired by Kali. Think deeply, therefore, ere harm befall thee."

" What harm can befall me ? "

" It is in the power of Kali to turn thee into a woman."

" How so ? "

" By suggestion."

" Rot ! " I exclaimed.

He flushed angrily, turned, and disappeared again in the same clump of grass.

Soon after he left, I shivered and decided to get back to my camp. The walk back seemed interminable. My bones ached, every step felt like a stab, and my vision became blurred. Distant objects seemed to get no nearer as I plodded on, tripped over roots, cursed stones on the path, stumbled down nullahs and clawed my way up the sides. When a bear crossed my path, I lacked the will to raise my rifle, and I took no interest in a cobra that snaked past my feet.

Back in camp, I fell into a camp-chair and ached. At sunset my teeth chattered and my body shook with rigors. A severe attack of malaria, I thought, and swallowed seventy five grains of quinine. A restless night followed and dawn brought no relief. Another day and night of fever passed,

my skin remained dry, I could not sweat, and I suffered from an intolerance of light. On the third day I became lethargic and towards the evening a paralytic drooping of an eyelid warned me to summon the State doctor. The runner who carried the message returned and said the doctor was ill and could not come. Sometime later I was told that he had heard that my illness was connected with Kali, and therefore decided not to interfere between goddess and patient.

Bad new travels fast, but frightened doctors prefer not to travel at all.

The next stage in my illness was mental. Confused thoughts raced through my mind as I lay in bed with partially closed eyes. What did the young priest say? Did he not tell me that sex was an accident of birth, and that Kali could turn me into a woman? Was I a woman? If so, why was I not told? But no one told me I was a man. I must have been a man or Kali would not have threatened to turn me into a woman. Hell! If Kali transforms me into a woman, womanly secrets will no longer be hidden. But how will I profit? Hell! How can I become a man again? Grovel before the priests? Must think about it. Something is troubling me. Wish I could think. Something connected with a temple and a dam. Am I dreaming or can I hear a choir chanting in monotonous unison—temple—or—levee—levee — and — pain — sahib — with — out — reason — think—once—again?

Oh! Damn the temple and damn the dam! And damn the conch shells and temple bells that keep ringing in my head.

Sometime during my delirious or hypnotic condition, my Brahmin servant, Jageshwar, crept into the tent. " Sahib," he whispered, " set thy gods against ours."

Courageous words from a devotee of Kali.

I was unable to tell him that I only had a nodding acquaintanceship with my gods and stared appealingly at him.

" Kali, Kali, forgive thy servant, for the sahib hast been kind to me and mine," he prayed softly, and crept out.

I wondered what he meant.

I felt better after Jageshwar left, but Kali was still a jump ahead of my gods and seemed determined to make me suffer or build the temple.

Kali's next move was a form of negativism. I felt compelled to resist my desires. I craved for food, alcohol, and tobacco, and refused to eat, drink, or smoke. I wanted to build the dam, and decided to build the temple. I hated the priests, and hoped to meet them. I longed to sleep, and kept awake.

Jageshwar entered as I tried to rise and write to the High Priest. " Drink, sahib," he said softly, and handed me a cup containing some bitter mixture.

A few minutes later, it amused me to see Jageshwar becoming smaller and smaller. I was about to warn him, but he vanished.

" Where am I ? " I exclaimed and stared at Jageshwar, who woke me by stroking my forehead.

" Thou hast returned from a great sleep, sahib."

He did not tell me that a great quantity of opium induced a prolonged sleep.

" How long have I been ill ? "

" That which befell thee, remained for fourteen days."

" You mean fever ? "

" Nay, sahib. I dare not say the name of She who smote thee."

" That evil has passed."

" The priests are not without power still."

My heart sank.

" Look, sahib ! " he exclaimed as he drew aside the screen from the tent door and pointed. " That which lifted the evil, may, perchance, keep thee from further harm."

I looked and understood what Jageshwar meant when he prayed : " Kali, Kali, forgive thy servant, for the sahib hast been kind to me and mine."

The courageous fellow intended to thwart his Goddess. He journeyed to Kali's temple and returned with many shrubs

of the sacred tulsi, which he planted round my tent and thereby banished Her malign influence.

When I was able to rise and dress, it cheered me to find no trace of the weaker sex about me and to feel I could face a womanly woman again.

When Colquhoun, who had been summoned by Jageshwar, arrived, he asked no questions for a day or so. Which was typical of the man. A day or two later, he said: "What in hell made you cancel the temple project?"

"Because the site selected by the priests commands an extensive valley. If a dam is built across the valley, hundreds of acres of fertile land will come under irrigation."

"Are you sure?"

"Positive!"

"Hum," Colquhoun said and fingered his chin thoughtfully. "Why not compromise and build both temple and dam?" he then asked.

"If a dam is constructed, the hill, on which it is proposed to build the temple will be submerged."

"I see. In the circumstances, the irrigation scheme will have to be abandoned in favour of the temple."

"God!" I groaned.

Colquhoun has let us down, I thought. Is this the man I looked up to? How could I face my Bhil friends? How could I face their women? The poor, resigned little savages would suffer, but they were inured to pain and disappointment and would be the last to protest. I could not continue to work with Colquhoun, the bloody Political Agent and semi-politician. Blast him!

"Bhils are nomads," Colquhoun said evenly, "and it matters not where they live provided they obtain sufficient land for their needs. There may be a general exodus from this neighbourhood soon."

Colquhoun's eyebrows merged with is hair when I rose and said angrily: "I'm no politician, thank God, but before I turn in I want you to understand that I'm finished with you

and your States. I will, of course, carry on till I am relieved."

* * *

" And thou," said Colquhoun, addressing a deputation of Bhils who had been summoned to meet him, " wilt prepare to leave thy villages, for it has come to my knowledge that thy fields are no longer fertile."

Not a Bhil blinked.

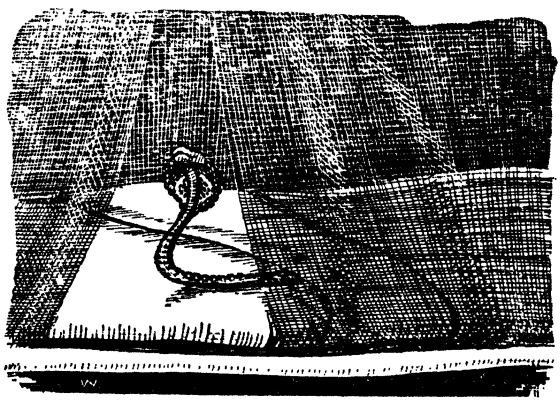
" To each," Colquhoun continued, " shalt be given as much land as he now hath. Moreover, all such lands will be watered by the aid of wells which thy Raja hath promised to sink. As for the matter of the temple, the priests may do as it pleaseth them. Depart now, my children, and speak the news among thy people."

Priests cannot fatten on a temple without a congregation, and, therefore, Colquhoun's decision to depopulate that area put an end to the temple project. But Kali and Her Kind may not be defeated, so the High Priest declared that the site selected for the temple had become polluted.

In course of time, the dam was built, and because Bhils only live for the day, they lived happily ever after.

If my internal spirit cuts a caper whenever I come across a temple, Colquhoun, when he makes a landfall in Heaven, deserves to oust Solomon, his jealous rival in all Heavenly disputes.

Soon after the Bhils left, Colquhoun declared he heard a voice bleat: " May I withdraw my resignation, please ? "



CHAPTER VII

A Flooding Valley; Behaviour of Animals; Ants!; Strip-tease; Baby Monkey; Kidnapped; An Island of Horror; The Horns of a Dilemma; Fairy Lights.

WHEN the work on the dam was completed I camped on one of the hills surrounding the valley to see that no serious seepage occurred through the somewhat porous materials with which the dam was constructed.

It was an anxious time and only relieved by the curious behaviour of animals inhabiting the valley. As the waters commenced to rise the animals became uneasy and waded from cover to cover in search of high ground. But such manœuvre brought temporary relief for the flooding drove them to look for land that was higher still. In the general calamity an armistice seemed to have been agreed to, as hyena, wolf, and wild dog, deliberately ignored their legitimate prey as they snealed past wild-eyed deer and bellicose pig.

The behaviour of panther and tiger was not unexpected. These slinking assassins crept out of the valley with bellies

touching the ground, but their movements could be traced by barking monkey, miaw of peafowl, and the belling of sambur. The monkeys raced up trees from where they shouted abuse and decanted their innards—a nervous habit—on their slinking foes. And it was amusing to see panther and tiger, kings of the jungle, look beseechingly at the monkeys, as if they were imploring them not to betray their presence or direction of retreat.

From coverts of rank grass and bamboo, deer stepped daintily and hesitated with ears pricked before venturing further. They made a delightful picture as they moved on, the hinds leading, fawns frisking about, and wary old stags loitering with ears and antlers laid along their flanks. Sounders of pig crashed up the slopes and away with much grunting and barging aside of piglets by their gross elders. But pigs are unmannerly beasts. I saw a disgruntled boar jab his tusk into the stern of a stream-lined sow. She, of course, retaliated with a savage attack, which he skilfully avoided by sitting on all he possessed. A lone boar, making his way out of the valley, stopped suddenly and lowered his head. He remained motionless for a few moments and then charged into a clump of grass. The valley resounded with catcalls and out went a panther, whose feet barely touched the ground, as he bounded away with the vindictive pig behind. I hoped they would fight it out, but neither panther nor tiger will face a determined pig, and the quarrelsome pair disappeared over a neighbouring brow.

Bear, buffoons of the jungle, were the last to leave. They had not the sense to realize that wet feet at the moment meant a filled valley later on, and therefore climbed anthills where they remained whining piteously till forced off by the rising waters. Even then these buffoons seldom got clear away. They climbed trees and hung on with forefeet and hind legs till it was time to swim once more. When all but the tallest trees became submerged, it amused me to see half a dozen bears clinging to the upper branches of a tall tree.

As the waters rose, bear after bear slipped down and : " heeding not the rolling waves they swam for the shore."

As the valley filled, revolving black balls, about the size of footballs, could be seen dotted about the surface of the water. A strange phenomenon, I thought, and decided to investigate a large ball rolling toward the shore. Unfortunately, I investigated with a toe. The ball disintegrated suddenly and numberless black ants, a quarter of an inch in length, swarmed over me. I admit, blushingly, that in spite of a nearby cuddle of girls, I stripped to the skin. Never before, I suppose, have innocent maidens seen a man undress so hurriedly and for no apparent reason. There and then, and in full view of the interested girls, I turned about and commenced to pick off scores of ants fasted to my skin. Many were beyond reach and dug themselves in while I was engaged in trying to wrench the half of my behind forward. In desperation I turned to the girls, not figuratively, and pointing to the seat of the trouble, implored them to employ their hands as requisite and right quickly. But they seemed unwilling to put an end to an unusual entertainment and gigglingly nudged each other.

The girls departed soon after I pulled up my shorts, and I then became interested in a troop of baboon with white whiskers encircling their black faces. They were the least perturbed among the animals and seemed to think it was a great game. Like small boys they dared each other to get wet ; and whooped with delight when an incautious youngster, trying to show off, fell.

While watching the troop fooling about, a baby monkey dropped into the water with a plop. An unusual occurrence as babes cling to the mother's breast and are seldom dislodged. A moment after the wee thing fell, confusion took place in the tree. Mothers clutched their babes with one hand and leapt about on an arm and two legs. Babeless females gibbered at the careless mother and, females past bearing, clutched at where their babes once nestled. The tree shook and branches

broke as the excited monkeys leapt about and scolded the distracted mother.

When things quietened down, some of the bolder males descended to the lower branches and gazed at the waters like a lot of male Mélisandes. They had not the sense to scan the surface but continued to gaze at where the babe disappeared. In the meantime the distracted mother plunged in and swam about looking for the lost one. None saw the babe break surface and paddle to the nearest tree, where it curled up and dripped miserably. The first to catch sight of the dripping babe was a barren female. She leapt across, clutched the mite to her breast, and made off. It was, I suppose, her first babe collected illegitimately.

What a baby-chase then took place !

How I wished I could have seen the end of the hunt. For, it is said, that monkeys hold courts of justice to deal with baby snatchers and other delinquents, but is was not to be, and the last I saw of the kidnapping was the end view of the thief, followed by the whole troop as they surf-rode through the leaves.

Some days later, only an acre or so of the hill on which it was proposed to build the temple, appeared above the surface. Being curious to know if the hill top harboured marooned animals, I paddled toward the island in a native canoe. Viewed from some distance, my objective seemed to be quivering. An imaginary movement caused by refraction, I thought, and paddled on. A nearer view revealed the cause and I stared unbelievingly before me. Then a wave of nausea swept through me and my stomach heaved. The island, now an island of horror, was carpeted with a confusion of wriggling, slithering nastiness, spewed up by the flood. From the waters' edge to the crown of the hill, the terrible place seathed with a massed loathsomeness of heaving, crawling, squirming, ants, snakes, rats, centipedes, scorpions, that bit, clawed and stung, as they fought to be freed from similar horrors above and below.

Beautiful butterflies hovered over that death-swept carpet

or settled on the evil smelling glutinous fluid oozing from flayed bodies and pulped insects.

Drenched rats raced across snakes prepared to strike, and ants swarmed on centipedes gripped by scorpions, the victims of other ants. Earthworms curled and uncurled in opening and closing knots and spiders, racing across columns of ants, were disposed of almost immediately. Scores of red-eyed mongooses were dying of snake bite or at grips with snakes twined round their bodies. A frightened hare cheated death by movement. Not daring to rest, the distressed mite leapt across death again and again, and came to rest in the coil of a waiting python. It was kill and be killed in a terrible place by a terrible killing. The sustained murmur of myriads of atoms beneath a canopy of ants was even more distressing than the shrieks of animals being stripped alive. And the pungent reek of mangled insect and raw flesh, broiling in the sun, resembled stale honey, bat's drippings, and offensive kennels.

As I stood and scanned the waters, snakes, rats, and a mongoose or two, heading for the shore, tried to make a landfall in my canoe and were discouraged by the paddle. Centipedes and scorpions also tried to come aboard and were similarly treated. A large snake, as thick as a man's wrist, with the head about a foot above water, manœuvred round the canoe and seemed to be undecided whether to swim on, or come in with me. I breathed again when it swirled away. Then a greying wolf, swimming rapidly toward the shore, turned in my direction. I tried to paddle away hastily, but the canoe swung round and remained in about the same place.

A wolf is not a horned beast, so I cannot say I was on the horns of a dilemma, but I did a great deal of quick thinking.

I thought of swimming for the opposite shore ; of praying for safety ; of drowning the beast with my paddle. But it seemed to me that swimming was about as efficacious as prayer, so I determined to face the beast with the paddle. By this time the wolf was closing rapidly with only his snout and eyes above water. As I raised my paddle, he swam against

a massed ant ball. The ball broke and the ants swarmed over his head, they entered his eyes and fastened on his lips. The unfortunate brute struck at the water with his forefeet and went below stern first. Again and again he broke surface and sank when he tried to dislodge the ants by shaking his head. Then blinded and exhausted, the poor brute went below for the last time. But I was not spared the misery of the end. His struggles brought him below the canoe and I saw the bubbles rising from his filling lungs.

As I paddled to the shore, I doubted if it was right to take life by the million in order to bring security to a few Bhils.

Late that evening the wind died down and the water looked like glass. As I sat on a log, gazing at the waters, a score of Bhils with their women and children arrived. All carried small earthenware saucers, fitted with wicks immersed in oil.

" What is the meaning of this ? " I asked.

" To give thanks to thee for the dam and to pay homage to the Spirit of the Waters," said a young girl who should have been in bed.

" How so ? "

" Behold," she said.

The crowd then set alight to the wicks and pushed the tiny vessels out to sea. A little later, the surface of the lake became jewelled with fairy lights which rose and fell with the evening swell and my doubts were quelled.

CHAPTER VIII

Church Services; A Visitation of Clergy; Prayer is Answered; A Tactless Text; An Absent-minded Saint; An Expensive Jest; Moreover, the Dog; Dog Talk; Dogs Talk; A Bet; Clergymen's Despair; An Ecclesiastical Bug.

AS there was no church at Rajpur we gathered at the club when urged to confess that we were miserable sinners and that there was no health in us. It may have been due to lack of opportunity that we were not miserable sinners and it seemed to be a gross reflection of Dr Wazir Ali's ability when we bleated about our health. But Wazir Ali was shrewed enough to know that if we turned to prayer for comfort our faith was centred in our doctor. The news therefore that a brace and a half of clergy were scheduled to visit us caused consternation in the station.

"Why pick on us?" "What have we done?" "Who

is the local Jonah ? " were questions that were asked and unanswered.

It was not that we felt unfriendly towards the clergy, from whom we were immunized by geographical barriers, but none cared to house men whose presence might call for irksome restrictions.

Colquhoun declared bluntly that he was not prepared to go on the water-wagon for all the clergy in India and refused to house them. O'Grady threatened to go on tour if the visitors were stowed on him. Peeler said he was a policeman and therefore could not harbour those concerned with spiritual affairs. So the unfortunate Kerridge, being responsible for the welfare of important visitors, was forced to house them.

On the appointed day, the Most Reverend, the Very Reverend, and the Almost Reverend, became Kerridge's guests.

I liked the Almost Reverend at sight. When I met him he was lowering innumerable pink gins at the club. My liking changed to admiration when I saw him mopping up a mixture of drinks at the dinner given by Kerridge in honour of his guests. But when he enjoyed a rank cheroot from acrid start to soggy end and spoke to me, I turned aside and hunted for fresh air.

Soon after the Almost Reverend arrived he called on me. " Any drink in the place ? " he asked.

" Only whisky, gin, and vermouth, Padre."

" No bitters ? "

" A few drops, I think."

" Thanks ! I'll have a pink gin. But remember gin does not swim."

I poured a few drops of water into a large gin and agreed that it was wrong to drown good liquor.

" Water," he said, gravely raising the glass to his lips, " has caused more deaths than alcohol."

" How so ? "

" Remember the Great Flood ? "

" Seriously now," he said, after his third gin, "are you a church goer ? "

Evasive action seemed necessary. So I reminded him that there was no church in the station.

He replied dryly : " I am aware of that, but do you attend the services at the club ? "

" Very seldom."

" Why ? "

" Because I find it impossible to be a good Christian."

" Perhaps I may be able to help you," he said softly.

" I'm afraid you can't, Padre."

" I wonder ? " he murmured. " Do you believe in prayer ? " he then asked.

" I do when it comes off."

He smiled. " Prayer does, as you call it, come off. When prayer is not granted it is because we, ignorant of ourselves, beg our own harms, while the Wise Powers deny us for our own good ; so we find profit by losing of our prayers. And that " said he, " is a little saying of my own."

" It sounds somewhat familiar," I said suspiciously.

" I should have said," replied the unblushing fellow, " that it might have been a little saying of mine had Shakespeare not thought of it first. Before I leave," and he looked at me through kindly eyes, " I hope you will try to remember that even when prayer is granted, cynics call it coincidence. Alas," he continued thoughtfully, " the Church is sadly neglected nowadays."

" I have often wondered why ? "

Instead of replying to my question, he said : " The young go to Church because they are taken ; the old because they fear to be taken suddenly. I must be off ! " he exclaimed, looking at his watch.

" Just one more drink, Padre ? "

" No thanks. I don't really live by suction, you know."

Our first service at the club opened with that rollicking hymn : A Few more Years shall Roll.

We were then thoroughly depressed and prepared to believe anything.

The sermon was delivered by the Very Reverend, a podgy church-emptier, cursed with sufficient money to keep body and soul apart and who looked as if he'd been annointed with treacle. Although he had the run of the Bible the text he chose was : "Evil men and seducers shall wax more and more, deceiving and being deceived."

The tactless text offended many of the female congregation who were neither evil nor seductive, but it was generally agreed that the Very Reverend was thoroughly familiar with his subject. Some wondered where he managed to collect so much information about the adulterer and his ways. I picked up a tip or two.

I squinted at Peeler during the sermon, hoping to see the wicked fellow wince when he heard how seduction and deception waxed with practise. But he was unmoved and judging by the smug look on his face I gathered that waxing sins were all right by him. I therefore made up my mind to speak severely to him after the service.

"Peeler," I said, "I hope that will be a lesson to you, my lad."

"What in Hell do you mean ?" he exclaimed.

"The Very Reverend's warning, of course."

"What about it ?"

"Have you forgotten how he warned us that unless we eschew evil practises, they become a habit ?"

Peeler was ten years my senior and looked at me with wonder. "If," he said pityingly, "the Very Reverend will tell me where I can acquire such habits, I am prepared to thank him."

Further discussion seemed inadvisable because the Most Reverend, a lovable old man, joined us.

"Did you like the sermon ?" he asked.

"I did not !" I exclaimed warmly.

"And why not ?"

I forgot that I was speaking to a respected member of the

cloth and said indignantly: "Because we are not evil men, and because seduction is impossible in this blamed station."

Suppressed twitters from the Twins seemed to suggest that they did not share my views.

Had we known the Most Reverend as he was known and loved in his diocese, we might have quarrelled among ourselves for the honour of housing the much loved old man.

The dear old man was absent minded. When dining with a very important official, an acknowledged epicurean, he turned to his wife during a lull in the conversation and said reproachfully: "My dear, I cannot say we have benefited by changing our cook."

Their indifferent cook had been dismissed that morning.

God bless him. Soon after his wife's death, he too died. Without her he was lost, so he joined her.

Some years later I paused before his grave. And because I'm a sentimental bloke my eyes filled when I read

She first deceased;
He for a little tried
To live without her.
Liked it not, and died

on the simple head stone.

I wonder if he was as absent minded in Heaven as he was on earth? Did he, for instance, apologize to her for not accompanying her on her last journey? I feel sure he said: "Forgive me for being late, dear. But you must not blame me if you will persist in getting to such inaccessible places."

Although my eyes filled when I read his epitaph, it seems that much is forgotten of the dear departed. For instance, the laziest crook in our regiment never earned: "Well done thou Good and Faithful Servant," on his tomb. And it is difficult to believe that "All the Bright Company of Heaven hold" Wilkins, a poor soldier and bad friend, "in their high Comradeship."

Then again, who cannot sympathize with the parents who wrote this of their babe?

She peeped in.
Looked about.
Didn't like it,
Hooked out.

And how well the children knew mother when they wrote,

The Trumpet sounds.
Peter calls : " Come ! "
The Pearly Gates open
And in walks Mum.

The Almost Reverend's last service cost us a lot of money. We hoped to pull his leg, he lamed us financially.

After a rousing sermon, the offertory bag was hawked round and as is the custom in India, where none carry money, we signed chits and popped them into that unpopular begging bag. We expected to see the Almost Reverend grin when he joined us, but he jerked this thumb in the direction of the club bar and we followed.

Because a padre's stipend is small, he surprised us by the generous way in which he ordered drinks for all. It was double whisky for men and cherry brandy—a sickly drink that stirs no man and is so obstinate in the morning—for women. None but he was allowed to pay and the evening went well. When it was time to leave, the Almost Reverend turned out his pockets and produced the chits he found in the offertory bag.

" And now," he said cheerfully, " its time we settled up. But before we do so take a tip from me. The next time you fellows feel inclined to give to the church, please make out chits for money and not for drinks. It will be cheaper in the end."

His remarks met with roars of laughter. More laughter followed when he read out our chits. Mine was good for three bottles of whisky. Peeler confessed that the chit for half a case of champagne bore his signature, and Colquhoun fell for a quart of gin. O'Grady presented the church with six bottles of liqueurs and an order for a case of brandy came from Kerridge. The laugh was with us till the Almost

Reverend summoned the club babu and liquidated his drink bill with our chits. He entertained us at our cost for one whole evening.

It was not easy to laugh that off.

To add to our misery he made us sign chits for money and looked over our shoulders to see that they were valid for more than some of us could afford.

Our wily priest owned an inseparable dog he called Moreover. His mongrel dog was a regular churchgoer who lay beneath the improvised pulpit and dosed or gazed at his master with the soft look dogs assume when they try to express the overflowing affection of a doggy heart. A prolonged scratch or a sacrilegious yawn terminating like the whine of a creaking hinge, earned : " Quiet, Moreover ! " from a master who thought nothing of interrupting the service for a word with his dog.

When I questioned the Almost Reverend about his dog's forebears, he whispered : " Hush ! don't say dog."

" Why not ? "

" Because Moreover is listening."

" I know, but —— ? "

The padre place his lips near my ear. " Moreover," he said softly, " doesn't know he is a dog ; he thinks he is one of us."

It was my turn to whisper. " What could his parents have been ? "

And again the padre whispered : " His mother was easily led ; he is a secret breed."

I took a long look at Moreover and concluded that his mother must have been woefully fickle, for he was, without doubt, a canine cocktail and a two-faced little dog. The belligerent look, caused by a hostile ear in the starboard side, was offset by a benign expression on the port quarter, due to an ear that drooped. His speaking behind conveyed information and an outsize bark made him recoil like a gun.

During one memorable service Moreover disturbed our devotions and brought womenly knees above their chins while

he hunted a rat between our legs, across chairs, and through our legs again. The Almost Reverend appealed for help and the service ended in a wild scramble with men stumbling over chairs and women waiting for the worst.

On another occasion Moreover tiptoed down the aisle to fight a trespassing pi dog. Led by the Almost Reverend, we dropped our prayer books and rushed to save the dog from serious injuries. There is bound to be trouble I thought, when Moreover is secured and led up for treatment.

I was right.

I based my fear on the peculiar fact that all men and women stationed in India claim to be county folk in exile. In order to support such preposterous claims they pretend to a profound knowledge of horses and dogs, their injuries and diseases. But these amateur vets are intensely jealous and seldom agree in diagnosis or prognosis. It followed, therefore, that the unfortunate dog was bound with an assortment of handkerchiefs and none of the vets were on speaking terms, except the Almost Reverend, who thanked all and carried the injured animal to my bungalow where he removed the bandages and re-wound the suffering animal according to some pet theory of his own.

Moreover became a hero and enjoyed the leisure of wounds for a few days. He remained with me and his master haunted my bungalow till the dog recovered.

One evening, after a request dinner, when the Almost Reverend ate an inordinate number of quail on toast (I kept a score or two of quail in a quail-pit where they fattened at an all-in cost of about a penny per bird) we sat beneath the stars and talked dog.

" Moreover," said the padre, and Moreover rose to lick an affectionate hand before settling between his master's knees, " adopted me when he was a pup."

A few taps by a mongrel tail told us that Moreover was an interested listener.

The padre smiled and continued. " He smelt of hay, damp toast, and mother."

"I know the smell," I murmured.

"I sometimes think," said the padre pensively, "that canine life is far too short. The gods should have blessed dog lovers with one dog for life. A loyal companion to share his master's joys and sorrows till both passed out together. And Moreover shares my views," he said seriously.

Again the mongrel tail tapped the grass knowingly.

I agreed, but wondered how it would work out, because dogs acquire the good or bad characteristics of their owner. A surly man's dog becomes vicious and an embittered spinster's lapful of unhealthiness becomes like the owner in temper and appearance.

"Too true," he laughed. "But can you explain why dogs have abandoned their own kind in favour of man?"

"What do you mean, padre?"

"Just this. Why should a fight take place when a strange dog enters another dog's home?"

"God knows."

The padre continued: "The doggy host ought to welcome the stranger. He should say: 'Come in, old pup, and have a sniff round. I warn you, though, that the smells are not what they used to be. Not since master collected a strange female. A pernickety bitch, I call her. The way she mops up, makes my lips curl in contempt. Take a sniff in this corner. You'd hardly believe it was the real thing a sniff or two ago. Would you? I would not recognize it as one of mine. In fact, I'd be a very worried pup if I thought that my sniffs smelt of Jays. My master? You mean old faithful? Dear old chap! At times I find it difficult to believe he is a man. He understands everything I say and I often wish he could talk. Better not, perhaps? I suppose so. He adores me and hardly ever takes his eyes off me. I'd not part with him for all the bones in China. Its a peculiar thing, but all men like me. I suppose it is because I'm a manny dog. My man does what he likes, although I never spoil him. Of course he sleeps on my bed. No! He does not smell and I've never seen a flea on him.

He may be a mongrel, but mongrel-men are far more intelligent than the well-bred. Yes! Like all men, mine was dirty about the house, at first. I must have used pounds of pepper before he was cured. He's clean now. Unless, of course, a strange man comes in and is naughty."

I laughed. "What a sentimental bloke you are, padre."

"Of course I'm sentimental. Are we not all sentimental? As a nation, I mean. Who, but we, could think of the Unknown Warrior? The Two Minutes Silence? The Cenotaph?"

"And," I added, "who, but we, fill a theatre with hushed 'Ahs!' when a babe, dog, cat or colt, is depicted on the screen?"

"Sentimental!" he exclaimed again. "Damn it! Yes! I'd not lend a book I could not read to the man or woman who does not care for animals."

"Amen, to that," I said fervently.

Peeler asked the Almost Reverend why he named his dog Moreover.

"Because a dog by the name of Moreover is mentioned in the Bible," he said.

"Rot!" exclaimed Peeler, rudely.

Peeler was quarrelsome. He said he felt resentful because he had to force his way to the bar against the common thirst.

The Almost Reverend looked reproachfully at Peeler. "You seem to have forgotten the Scriptures, Peeler."

"Perhaps, I have," Peeler replied, sourly. "But I'm willing to bet that no dog by the name of Moreover is mentioned in the Bible."

"How much?" exclaimed the padre—a little too eagerly, I thought.

"A double gin?"

"Make it two," the padre raised the bet.

"Ten, if you like," replied Peeler confidently.

"Right! I'll close with ten doubles and drinks all round.

But, Peeler, are you sure you would not like to withdraw? I'd hate to take the spirit out of you."

With a winner's grin spreading across his face, Peeler said scornfully: "Men who think they can fool all men all the time, are padres." And he added, unnecessarily: "Those who think they can gull women all the time, are doctors. But you can't fool me, padre, so go ahead."

The Almost Reverend looked keenly at Peeler: "Speaking from memory," he said, "in the story concerning Lazarus, the Bible clearly states: 'And, moreover, the dog licked his sores.'"

Peeler choked. He assured us he was damned. He then muttered something about the church and sharp practise and tried to get out of the bet because of some trivial distinction between noun, adverb or adjective. But we were interested in the promised drinks and not in the King's English, so Peeler had to pay. He refused to drink with us at his expense and left the club. On his way out we heard him say: "These ruddy incumbents are as income-bent as laymen."

The visitation of the clergy caused little harm in the station. After they left Peeler declared he was delighted to see the last of their sterns. The Kerridges were the only sufferers and we relapsed into that lethargic condition, known as "clergyman's despair," which paralyses effort and even saps the sinful urge.

Mrs Kerridge collected an ecclesiastical bug and contracted a form of religious mania; a heavenly stroke that hardens arteries and drives the stricken to good works. Fired by some zealous emotion, she decanted her husband's liquor down the kitchen drain and scattered his smokes among their servants.

A selfish act. For if it ensured his entry into Heaven, it raised the odds against their servants.

Poor Kerridge! Overcome by spasmodic daring, he reminded her that Christ turned water into wine. She silenced the miserable little man with a superior sniff and said acidly: "I prefer not to be reminded of that."

The Godly woman depressed all who had the misfortune to come into contact with her. Only Peeler seemed to be immune from her lowering influence. He expressed our thoughts when he repeated a child's prayer. " Dear God," the toddler whispered, " please make good people nice and bad people good."

We had every reason to be unhappy about Mrs Kerridge's conversion, because the absence of drink at home and the fear of signing chits at the club, drove Kerridge to secret drinking at our cost. Only once did he try to earn our respect by defying his wife. He refused to accept a drink and treated all, including himself, to innumerable rounds. When charged with alcoholic courage he staggered back to wife and dinner. None know what happened to the little man when he zig-zagged home. Accidents happen in the best bedrooms and good women have their own methods of dealing with lost souls. But Kerridge was also infected with the religious bug and became the saddest little clown in the station.

Both converts came in for the usual criticism. It seemed to us, wrongly perhaps, that it was immaterial to the Kerridges how we fared so long as they were saved. As a small community, we could ill spare the company of two of our members even if they were battling for their souls. But how the couple altered ! Before becoming a good woman Mrs Kerridge dressed well, looked smart, and earned the attention she deserved. But how she deteriorated in appearance as she acquired uplift ! Perish the thought ! But suspicion remains. Does dowdiness, not cleanliness, come next to godliness ?

And Kerridge ? The unhappy little man became impossible. Kerridge's conversation was confined to the salvation of Kerridge. And as head of the district, he placed himself at the head of the queue on the spoor to Heaven.

Unfortunately, he also became a Godsend to guilty litigants. The Indian is no fool. When it became known that Kerridge's religion commanded him to forgive and forget, the Indians took advantage of Kerridge the magistrate. Such

as were guilty had but to declare they were contrite and away went the Indian Penal Code.

Mrs. Kerridge became a zealous reformer who tried to do her duty when two or three of us were gathered at the bar. But when we found that continence was the minimum requisite for future security, we turned to hop, vine, and barleycorn, for consolation.

Soon after she failed to reclaim us, Mrs Kerridge became introspective and roamed about her garden at twilight.

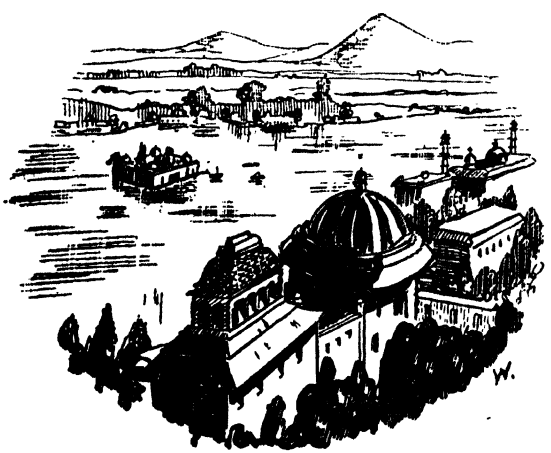
During the evening before the clergy were due to leave, we were celebrating their departure at the club. The Almost Reverend suddenly remembered he had forgotten to say good-bye to the Kerridges and off he went, after reminding us to save a bosom-caresser—a spiritual cordial—for him.

Mrs Kerridge was, as usual, wandering about the garden with head bent in contemplation.

" Come ! Come ! " exclaimed the padre, looking over the hedge, " You ought not to be alone at this dismal hour."

" I'm not ! " she cried, blissfully, " I'm walking with Jesus."

"I'll tell Tom," he whispered as he leapt the hedge in search of Tom Kerridge.



CHAPTER IX

Durbars; Bowels of Compassion; The Unruly Raja; A Royal Outburst; Royal Weanings; Royal Favourites; Thou Political Agent; Womanly Currency; A Scared Political Agent; Poison; The Royal Poisoner.

KIPLING knew more about India than the most backward Viceroy, but he was mistaken when he wrote :

Oh, East is East, and West is West,
And never the twain shall meet.

The twain do meet. They meet at durbars, where the West cuts a sorry figure in gent's suitings and cocked hats sprouting farmyard feathers, compared with the gorgeous raiments of purple, silver, and cloth of gold of the East. But durbars vary in magnificence, as they depend upon the resources of the State in which they are held. A wealthy State stages a brave show with costly trappings, red carpets, gilded chairs, and armed retainers clothed in comic opera uniforms. A poor State has to be content with humbler trimmings, where expensive carpets and lacquered chairs give place to rugs, office furniture, and the armed guards are wizened Bhils in scanty loin-cloths.

Similarly, the atmosphere depends upon the relationship between Raja and Political Agent. When Raja and Political Agent are on good terms, durbars become friendly gatherings where all love one another and the onlooker is justified in feeling that only Britain can earn the affection of a subject race. The ceremony ends with noisy congratulations fired at the Political Agent and only the Raja's confidants hear him whisper: "By the gods! What a ruddy bore that was!"

If, however, the Raja is in disgrace at the time for, say, appointing an incompetent favourite to a position in authority against the advice of his Political Agent, who had earmarked the job for a pet of his own; or, if in the numbering of the women in the palace the Raja refuses to decrease expenditure by parting with one or more of his darlings, then a durbar can become exceedingly atmospheric. On such occasions a deep depression, commencing in the P.A.'s seat, advances inexorably towards Raja and official and all wriggle uneasily as they pray to be humbled collectively and not singly.

Durbars served a useful purpose in the bad old days when Rajas ruled with barbaric severity or with bowels of compassion. For the bowel was indeed responsible in bringing forth all that was good or bad in royalty. Then, any subject could claim the right to prostrate himself to plead for justice or mercy. But whether the supplicant got trampled on by elephants—a popular and spectacular punishment—or obtained mercy, depended on the condition of the Raja's innards.

Colquhoun differed from others in that he made it known that durbars were halls of audience, not male mannequin parades, where all could attend and state their grievances without fear. While quick to praise he seldom rebuked in public, but when repeated warnings were ignored he made an example of the culprit.

One of our kinglets became a culprit. Known as the Unruly One, he felt hurt because he was not allowed to write to other kinglets on official matters. Petty chiefs are not permitted to correspond among themselves on State affairs

for fear they might come to some common agreement which might be detrimental to the governing power. But the governing power made a grave mistake when it stated that such restriction was only imposed to prevent petty chiefs from quarrelling among themselves. A provocative excuse which would not deceive a half-wit. The Unruly One was not deceived nor could he understand why he, a doughty man-of-war and lusty man-of-women, should be subjected to any restrictions, so Colquhoun decided to reason with him at a special durbar.

All went well till Colquhoun pointed out how unwise the U.O. was when he tried to stir up trouble among his pals.

The U.O. fixed an opiumed eye on Colquhoun and bellowed: "Even one bereft of reason would know why the Government does not permit us to write to one another. Am I not a King?" he thundered. "And am I not aware of such tricks? The order is intended to make the matter of ruling easier. It is in my mind that the Government will soon order us to keep apart in thought."

Royal outbursts must be discouraged, so Colquhoun closed the Durbar and confiscated the Unruly One's toy, a silver-plated Rolls Royce with gold fittings, in which he careered about the country.

I liked the Unruly One even if he was a bellicose scoundrel. Brought up to believe himself to be semi-divine he broke every State law on the grounds that laws were made by kings for commoners. It was rumoured that only those women who lived beyond fifty miles of the palace were said to be more or less safe from his attentions. Later, when he purchased his temporarily confiscated car he increased the radius of desire by many horse-power. But like so many princelings his was a raw deal from birth. He was reared among women who spoilt the little brat by pandering to every selfish mood or whim. When old enough he was sent to an Indian college where he lived out, which again was bad for a well endowed youth, who was served by servile servants eager to obey every harmful wish or command. Such was the Unruly One's

education and the reason why he became arrogant and about as stable as a hiccup.

The postal service became impossible soon after the Unruly One dismissed the senior officials and replaced them by relatives and in-laws, who had no knowledge of the work. No hope of improvement could be hoped for unless all were summarily dismissed. A straightforward solution. But straightforward solutions can become complicated family affairs in native states. In this State there were far too many square pegs decaying in round holes. When told that his relatives and in-laws had to be removed, the Unruly One said uneasily: " Seek another road leading from this trouble, for there would be no peace in the palace if such a calamity happened."

" There is no other road," I said firmly.

" I tell thee that another road must be found," said he with equal firmness.

" There may be a jungle path, Raja sahib."

" Where ? " he asked eagerly.

" If thy relatives remain, then others will also be appointed to perform the work, but the cost of thy people will fall on thy head and not on the treasury."

The Unruly One refused to support or dismiss his relatives and in-laws, but he told his indignant women that Colquhoun, backed by the Government, had done so in order to install certain favourites of mine.

Soon after his loved ones lost their jobs I dined with the Unruly One and wondered if the women who prepared the food knew a thing or two about poison. As I rose to leave he said: " I hope to set eyes on thee soon, sahib."

I felt uneasy and replied: " I only hope I shall be able to see you, Raja sahib." But I was thinking of poisoning and did not intend to be rude.

During dinner the conversation turned to the services in England. The Unruly One imagined England was a State like his, only larger.

" Tell me," he said, " How is it in thy country ? Thy

Head Post-wallah must be a very clever man. Is it not so ? "

" I know not if he, who is named the Postmaster-General, be clever. This I do know. He knows naught of postal work, nor could he be certain of the colour of a shilling stamp."

" Ah ! " he murmured, " because thou art my guest, I may not remind thee of certain others who, being also ignorant were removed by thy orders from a life of ease. But tell me, how comes it that thy head post-wallah is so placed. Is it because his is the blood of kings ? "

I grinned as visions of plebian P.M.Gs, passed through my mind. " Nay," I replied. " He is of the people and the work is in the nature of a gift to the man who is favoured at the time."

" To close his mouth ? " he asked.

" Nay ! Rather may it be said to open his mouth in the aid of the Government."

" How then," and he looked puzzled, " is the work fulfilled, if he who knows naught is placed at the head ? "

" The work is performed by white babus whose heads grow grey and shoulders weary in the support of the ignorant."

" Waugh ! he exclaimed. " But what of the man who has the selling of such favours ? He must be a man of great wealth."

He gave me no time to defend the Prime Ministers from a charge of bribery.

" Are all thy head men," he continued, " appointed in the same manner and for the same reason ? "

I felt it was time to change the subject and replied : " I have but little knowledge of such matters, Raja sahib."

I thought it unwise to tell him that the First Lord of the Admiralty would be well informed if he knew the meaning of an orlop deck, or that the Minister of Health might well confound the Dick Test with the return of the Ashes.

" It is in my mind," he continued reflectively, " that we are wiser than the English. For we look to blood to support blood and therefore appoint blood-brothers to places of trust. How can those govern, who are born to serve ? "

A remark that set me thinking.

The Unruly One was vindictive, ill tempered, and of long memory. He never forgave Colquhoun for depriving him of his Rolls-Royce and vowed to be revenged.

I happened to overhear the explosive fellow bullying the Diwan for some trivial offence.

" Thou son of a pig ! " he shouted. " Thou Sala ! " " Thou bhanchute ! Thou-thou-thou Political Agent ! "

The unfortunate Diwan remained stolidly indifferent till called a Political Agent, when he wilted and was carried out.

" Why," asked the U.O. during another dinner, " is Colquhoun sahib's heart turned against me ? "

" Because of thy behaviour, for is it not said that thy favourite pastime is women ? " I said sternly.

" And why not ? Am I not still young ? "

" Age," I replied, " should have no bearing on such matters."

" I will ask thee to repeat such words twenty years hence," he growled.

" Enough of such small matter," he said, " but when will Colquhoun sahib return my car ? "

Colquhoun smiled when I told him the Unruly One longed for the return of his car, but Colquhoun did not smile when the Unruly One sent him a peculiar gift. My chief was far too frightened to look the gift mare in the mouth.

We were on a tour of inspection and were living in the Unruly One's guest-house. Sometime about midnight I was wakened by hearing Colquhoun shouting. I grabbed up a hurricane lantern and raced to his room.

" What's wrong ? " I exclaimed.

Without a word he pointed to a figure crouched in the corner of the room.

My mind watered as I looked at the contours of a slim figure draped in a white sari, and I wondered why Colquhoun, who had only one woman to deal with, chose to make such a fuss. Moreover, the womanly distribution seemed to be unfair and I told him so.

" This is serious," he said angrily as he got out of bed and called for the sentry.

In rushed the sentry, followed by the havildar and both stood to attention.

Colquhoun pointed at the woman. " Did'st thou allow her to pass ? " he asked.

" Aye," replied the sentry.

" When did it happen ? "

" But now, sahib. She has been in thy room for less time than it takes to smoke the part of a bidee " (cigarette).

" How came it that she was permitted to pass ? "

" Because of the words of the armed men who accompanied her."

" Repeat their words, thou fool."

" They said she was the woman of thy choice among all in the palace, wherefore did I let her pass.

Colquhoun turned to the havildar and ordered him to summon two of the guard and return the woman to the palace.

"Phew!" he whistled as we moved into the dining-room, " I need a drink."

The Unruly One planted the woman in Colquhoun's room and, had he not wakened as she entered, much might have happened to Colquhoun.

" What do you intend to do with the Unruly One ? " I asked.

" Nothing, of course. I could not prove he had a hand in the matter and I am a believer in :

'Tis well if the court shall acquit thee,
T'were best had'st thou never been tried.

" In which case," I said earnestly, " I suggest that we get

out of this ruddy State forthwith. The Unruly One may turn his woman on to me and I'm inclined to become anthropopathical (affectionate) after sunset."

As we were preparing to leave for Rajpur the Unruly One called to see us off and, judging by the sweet nonsense that flowed from our lips, we might have been lifelong friends. He hoped we might live for ever and, not to be outbidden, we hoped he'd live a little longer. A forced laugh or two and we were off, but I felt disappointed with Colquhoun and thought he should have smitten the Unruly One on hip and thigh.

The first signs of rebellion came from my subordinates who were quick to follow the Raja's lead and became impudent and lazy. I found it difficult to keep my hands from their ears or my toes from their nether cheeks. But Colquhoun only smiled when I told him how my work was suffering and that no improvement could be expected unless he allowed me to treat my subordinates as masters deal with insolent schoolboys.

"I know," he said quietly, "but a graver matter has come to my notice. It is rumoured that the Unruly One intends to poison you."

"Poison me?" I exclaimed.

"So it is rumoured."

"Why?"

"He and his women are convinced that you brought about the dismissal of their relatives and in-laws. I am told that the women are particularly bitter and are giving the Unruly One a hell of a time in the palace."

"He would not dare to poison me!" I said uneasily.

"Why not?"

"Far too risky, of course. Besides, even petty chiefs do not kill off officials they dislike."

Colquhoun stroked his chin thoughtfully. "Years of debauchery have ruined his health and I doubt if the Unruly One is sane."

It did not occur to me that the risk attached to poisoning can be negligible in certain circumstances and, as Colquhoun made no comment, I refused to be intimidated by Raja or

Rani, so with a brave show of indifference, I said: "What do you propose to do?"

"I intend to visit the Unruly One and take you with me."

"The threat to poison me is only a rumour, as you know, but dare we trust any one, including our servants, while we remain in the Unruly One's State?" I asked.

"Nobody will have time to act," declared Colquhoun firmly.

It all seemed so melodramatic that I felt no alarm till I got into bed on the night before we set off for the Unruly One's State and thought of the future. I wondered if poisoning was necessarily painful. It depends on the kind of poison, of course. Could we trust our servants or the guard? And what did Colquhoun mean when he said: "Nobody will have time to act?" He ought to know that it does not take much time to slip a pinch of poison into food or drink. Was he trying to reassure me? Why was it necessary for me to accompany him? To prove that neither he nor I were afraid? He had no reason to fear. Hell! Must try to sleep. The Unruly One would not dare to murder me. Why not? God! Perhaps he intends to poison both Colquhoun and myself. Too risky? Not if he waited till corruption was far advanced before reporting our deaths by cholera. And he could account for any delay without being suspected. The messenger carrying the report of our deaths could be taken ill or be carried off by a tiger and none could dispute such a lie. Even if he sent a message by car to Rajpur the car could break down on the way. The Indian medical officer and chief of police would support the Unruly One, however grossly he lied. They might even take a hand in the poisoning. Hell! Why can't I sleep?

"Arise! sahib, arise! Five has struck and thy tea is ready," whispered my servant as he stood by my bed. "Moreover all is prepared for our journey to the Raja sahib's country."

The Unruly One met Colquhoun and myself at the State border and accompanied us to his palace.

" And now, Raja sahib," said Colquhoun to the Unruly One at a semi-private durbar where only the Diwan, Chief of Police, Chief Medical Officer, and myself, were present, " it has come to my ears that thou hast threatened," he pointed at me, " to take his life."

Every brown jaw dropped and all looked at the Unruly One, who wriggled uneasily as he tried to loosen his collar, swallowed, bit a lip, stammered, and finally raised his arms helplessly.

" I await thy answer," said Colquhoun firmly.

Indians possess powers of self-control which are denied to Europeans. The Unruly One was filled with rage and fear, but he pulled himself together and smilingly said : " I know not who put such evil thoughts in thy head, but my life is thine and I would willingly lose it to safeguard his."

" 'Tis not thy life that concerns me," said Colquhoun dryly. " But let that pass and chew these words with the teeth of understanding. Should any harm befall him while he is in thy State, thou wilt be held to account."

My God, I thought, what an idle threat. How could a man with Colquhoun's understanding threaten a man who knew every move in the game of threats ?

I was wrong.

Colquhoun continued evenly : " Think not that I have threatened idly, for I tell thee that before journeying here I sent a letter to the Lieutenant-Governor sahib, saying, that should'st harm befall *us* or should *we* lose our lives in this thy State, he must hold thee accountable forthwith."

Colquhoun, it seemed, feared for us both.

The Unruly One looked stunned and glanced uneasily at his henchmen, as if appealing for support.

" But Colquhoun sahib ! " exclaimed the doctor, coming to the assistance of his tongue-tied Raja, " should'st one or both of thee succumb to a fever or be overcome by cholera—what then ? "

" That too did not escape my mind at the time of writing to the Lieutenant-Governor Sahib. For I made it known to

him that fever is fever as cholera is cholera in British India, but in other places both fever and cholera may be confounded with poisoning."

" It is understood then," the Diwan spoke, " that should'st any ill overcome either of thee while in our land, that the Raja will be held responsible ? "

" Even so," replied Colquhoun firmly.

For a moment I expected the Clot would make a scene, but he controlled himself with an effort and growled : " So be it."

A cryptic remark which might have meant an angry challenge or sullen resignation.

That closed the durbar.

Before departing, however, we had to face the ordeal of pân supari.

Pân supari, a concoction of catechu, powdered lime, crushed areca nut and cardamom, wrapped in betul leaf, is comparable with the chewing gum of America. Both of these bad habits are chewed and never swallowed. There the resemblance ends. For pân supari, unlike chewing gum—that plastic, insoluble substance employed as a masticatory and parked surreptitiously beneath the furniture when unemployed—becomes blood-red when masticated. This sanguinary mass is then ejected in blood-like splashes on floor, carpet, wall, and the normal Indian household sometimes resembles an insanitary sanatorium.

The Unruly One clapped his hands and the Bearer of the Betul Leaf, an official who prepares pân supari, handed round leaves of objectionable habits on a brass tray. It is considered impolite to refuse such offerings, so bearing in mind the ancient tag : " Timeo danos et dona ferentes," which may be translated as, beware of the Raja's sanguinary mouthfuls, Colquhoun and I slyly pocketed our portions.

They seemed safer there.

During a lull in the somewhat forced conversation the Unruly One turned to Colquhoun and asked : " Will ye both eat with me in my palace to-night ? "

" Aye, and without fear," said Colquhoun.

" Sahib," replied the Unruly One, stroking his ample bosom, " thou art safer here than elsewhere for I have made it known that should any harm or ill befall either of thee whilst in my State that both the doctor and policeman are to be cast into jail forthwith."

We dined off the most delicious food that could be turned out of the royal kitchen, but Colquhoun found a snake in his bed that night.

On our return to Rajpur, I was on my way from the club to my bungalow and heard our bodyguard celebrating, rather noisily, in the police lines.

I stopped to ask the Havildar-in-charge of the bodyguard what the noise was about.

" We be Gurkhas, sahib," he hiccuped and saluted.

" Do I not know ? " I replied.

" Our faces were blackened by two armed men who overcame our sentry by lying words, whereby a woman from the palace was permitted to enter by night unto the presence of Colquhoun sahib."

" That, too, is known to me, Havildar sahib."

" Such men will not dare to blacken the face of a Gurkha again."

" What lies behind all this talk ? " I asked impatiently.

" I will tell thee, sahib. Being their Havildar, I could not allow it to be said that my men were deceived, but repaid not in full."

" Therefore ? "

" I caused a message to be sent to the two armed men to meet myself and one other Gurkha for a great entertainment in the bazaar of the State wherein we were deceived."

" And ? "

" Our guests became the entertainment," said the Havildar, and I guessed the rest.

The Unruly One's pimps were well and truly beaten.

CHAPTER X

Bhils; Peculiar Gods; Pagan Beliefs; Marriage; Virgins and Dreams; Yodelling Women; Aboriginal Medicine; My First Patient; A Tale of Footprints; A Curious Cure; Jungle Medicine and Jungle Law; My Second Patient and my First Client; A Matrimonial Affair.

ALTHOUGH they will not admit it, Bhils live in fear of the unknown, unseen, demons, witches, curses, and priests. Their Gods are many and rather than incur the wrath of unknown Gods they are prepared to revere any object, more particularly, if the object is colourful or inaccessible. Prominent hill tops are therefore occupied by hill sprites who must be propiated before a tree is felled. Similarly, the jungles are said to be guarded by spirits and, before an area of jungle is deforested, clumps of trees are spared to shelter the spirits. The Goddess of smallpox and cholera are worshipped

and the spirits of persons killed by tiger are greatly feared. The latter become Lukker-buggars, a strange animal, half bear and half woman, who grubble in burial grounds and devour the dead. The consumed dead are then reincarnated and become advanced Lukker-buggars with voracious appetites for near relatives. Like Churels, Lukker-buggars' feets are reversed. That is one reason why these pests are so difficult to track. The nearer one gets to them, the further they are away. Bats propogate through the mouth, and that is why a bat hangs by the legs when roosting. Scorpions were, at one time, the tongues of mothers-in-law.

With commendable reticence, I refuse to comment.

The Gods created man and man shaped women from a gourd. Which explains why men are God-like and women so empty.

Again, I make no comment.

Ghosts and witches differ, in that, ghosts may be propitated, witches discouraged. A ghost may be hoodwinked, but a witch requires tougher handling. The customary practice with a witch is simple and effective. While the suspect is held below water, any interested male twangs away an arrow as far as he is able. The arrow must be leisurely retrieved before the suspect is allowed to break surface. If she happens to be alive, she may not have been a witch. Another method of dealing with a female suspect is preferred because it eliminates the element of doubt. The unhappy woman is bound and heaved into deep water. If she sinks, she was a witch.

Scores of pagan beliefs dominate Bhil existence and some have their counterpart in our land.

If an ailing Bhil hears a jackal howl, it is accepted as a sure sign he will not recover. With us the owl takes the place of the jackal, and the same dire results are portended.

Bhil marriage customs differ from Indian in many ways. For instance, infant marriages are unknown and widows are encouraged to remarry. Then, unlike Indians who degrade widows and make their lives hell upon earth, Bhils treat

widows with respect. Because widows are wonderful? No! Only because widows are domesticated and the men believe that a woman who has lost one husband will be particularly assiduous in the care and maintenance of No. 2. But men who marry widows have their safeguards. Should a man who marries a widow have reason to believe that she poisoned husband No. 1 and may treat him in a similar manner, he leads her to the nearest pond and shoots an arrow into the air. Thereafter she ceases to hanker for husband No. 3.

Because I'm inclined to champion women, I questioned Varnia.

"Are men never suspected of wizardry, Varnia?"

"Did I not tell thee that men are God-like?" he replied indignantly.

Polygamy is countenanced, but rarely practiced because women are expensive chattels. Some men therefore obtain wives by barter.

It must be humiliating to hear the prospective bridegroom say to the girl's father: "I like the look of your youngest daughter. How much?"

The father, anxious to be rid of the girl in exchange for the maximum number of cows per girlish-inch, tries to look unconcerned and says admiringly: "You have an eye for a girl, old son. She is the pick of the lot. What about a couple of cows, three goats, and that hookah I admired last night in the grog shop?"

"No dice!" snorts the P.B. indignantly. "Have you noticed her legs? They are positively bandy." he adds depreciatingly.

"My word!" daddy exclaims. "You can drive a hard bargain."

"How about it, if I knock off a goat? And remember," purrs the father, "she does not cook with her legs."

"Not shop-soiled, is she?"

"Never left my eyes since she was born," the father lies.

"I'll think about it. Don't forget, old Paraj has promised me the first refusal among his little darlings."

Unlike our controlled price of seven shillings and sixpence per bride, the Bhil has no standard rate. " All women are not alike so why price them the same ? " says the Bhil.

The poorer Bhil earns a wife by serving his prospective father-in-law for an agreed period. Love's labour, an irksome custom, leads to serious trouble—as I discovered when asked to judge impatient couples who absconded before the appointed time.

Should a purchased wife be unsatisfactory—I was unable to arrive at a satisfactory definition of " unsatisfactory "—back she goes to her parents and part of the dowry is returned to the aggrieved husband. But the unhappy Bhil who laboured for a wife, loses wife and dowry if she proves to be unsatisfactory. His, was love's labour lost.

Before marriage, the morality of both sexes is not open to question. It is deplorable. In order to check promiscuity, unmarried men are housed in a large hut at night. An ineffective precaution, as girls are free to wander and lads dare not break out for fear of missing a wandering girl or two.

After marriage, infidelity is sporadic, except at the time of harvesting when Jack picks Jill or Jill picks Jack, and no questions are asked for three happy weeks. During that relaxing period wives desert husbands for men unlike husbands and husbands look to other women for whatever husbands look for in other women. All are happy ; care is banished ; divorce frozen ; and abandon prevails.

Even Aunty has her day.

I was anxious to learn if these pleasant lapses were followed by unpleasant happenings. So I asked a venerable looking scamp to tell me what happened to women whose " feet became heavy " (hush-hush for pregnancy) during licensing hours. He shrugged his shoulders and questioned me. " What matters it among friends ? Are not all babes alike ? " said the grinning old rip.

After that I never cared to whistle, " Whose Baby Are You, Dear ? " within earshot of a Bhil.

When asked if his people were chaste during the close

season, he closed one eye and said: " Sez you," in the Bhil tongue.

The capital cost of women is usually far beyond the loin-cloth (purse) of the needy Bhil. Even usurers are chary of lending money to a Bhil. Experience has taught them that it is impossible to squeeze a pea (peas, not beans, are the staple food) from the withers of the pealess. Some, therefore, obtain wives by hire purchase. Part of the purchase money is paid prior to the wedding and the bride is then hired out till she earns the balance due to her parents.

Which seems fair.

Turning now to the so-called weaker sex. I wish to state that the following is hearsay and without prejudice.

Women, it is believed, are carriers of sex. Curiously enough, the women believe so too, and are therefore jealous of other women for fear they may infect husbands.

One peculiar superstition puzzled me because it seemed so senseless. If a man dreams of his girl-friend she ceases to be a virgin. Always women's champion, I asked.

" What happens to the man who enters a maid's dream ? "

" Have we not told thee that dreams are visions of the soul and women are soulless ? " I was told.

Bhil women have a happy habit of yodelling to strange men. Their yodel, or come-hither sound, can baffle the unwary. If it is accepted as an invitation, women pretend to be indignant. If ignored, they become resentful. The truth is that yodelling means welcome when warbled by a charm of women and cot-luck if soft-pedalled by a lone girl.

One cannot live among an ignorant people without being called upon to cure minor ailments and settle disputes. But the successful treatment of boil, constipation, and headache, leads to far graver complaints such as cholera, smallpox, and malaria. In serious cases one can but try to alleviate suffering in spite of being handicapped by lack of knowledge, superstition, and revengeful jungle Gods.

When I commenced to practice I had no idea that Bhils too made use of gold, iron, arsenic and glandular extracts in the

treatment of diseases. In truth, I owed much of my initial training to old women, indigent priest and sorcerer. They, with the help of a medical compendium, supplied by the States, and some prompting by doctor friends, placed me high in the estimation of my wild patients.

The Bhil body, so I learned, is divided into 107 parts, the most important being the chest wherein lies the vital fluid. Rheumatism, a common ailment, is induced by curses, lack of attention to some particular God and the prolonged presence of mothers-in-law. The cure is obvious. Gods may be placated, mothers-in-law can be "taken for a ride," but curses are lifted by the application of tiger fat to the skin of the accursed. Impotence is a calamity which can be overcome by a bolus of the flesh of an anteater. In Britain a certain gland harboured by the goat is said to be equally efficacious in this distressing condition. The droppings, well boiled, of the spotted owl, contributes towards the unconditional surrender in protracted cases of unrequited passion and are greatly prized as love philtres. Incidentally, the wings, unboiled, on a pilot's tunic are just as effective.

Life is divided into 12 stages, the 12th being old age.

Nothing, I believe, can hurt more than: "You can't blame her, poor dear, she has entered into her twelfth."

There are two days in the life of every Bhil. On one none can save him and on the other even the Gods cannot harm. The trouble, of course, is to know which is D day.

It may interest the medical profession and all teetotallers to hear that drink has never been known to harm man or woman. And so say all the Bhils.

My first patient did not summon me. I found her.

I felt thirsty and rode towards a tope of trees where an old woman gave away water. India is studded with such places, the gift of pious men who hope to save their souls by quenching thirst. The unpaid attendants are not supposed to sell water but who can blame penniless men or women who earn a tip. I could not, although I was told that every tip lessened the

philanthrope's chance of a successful landfall in the Heaven of a philanthropic dream.

On reaching the well I called for water and an old woman crept out of her hut, plunged an arm into an earthenware jar and drew out a brimming panikin. It was after I had drained two panikins and gave her a few pence that I noticed the crusted and weeping pustules of smallpox on her arms.

" Ugh ! " I gulped as I looked at the weeping sores laved by the water resting in my stomach.

It does not do to be frightened or to think of the future. Not in India.

After checking an urge to vomit, I advised her to go to bed and engage a nurse forthwith. I was about to add that the cost of nurse and treatment would be met by me—very unprofessional—when the old biddy wailed : " How can a poor woman, without friends or money, summon a nurse ? "

It was then that I departed from medical procedure and endowed a nurse to look after her.

She recovered.

A few weeks later I had to pass her way and called on the old biddy.

" My life is thine," she said gratefully and knelt at my feet.

Although my reaction may be different with girls, I dislike to see an old woman kneeling at a man's feet.

" Rise, O mother, and guard thy life, for it now belongs to me."

" It behoves me to do so. For if thou art ill I will journey to thee however distant.

I made up my mind to keep well.

Natural death is unusual among these pathetic people. One may truthfully say that natural death is accidental. Malaria, dysentery, snakebite, tiger, panther, and bear, account for many lives and midwives are a major disease. Contrary to the general belief, the bear, not the tiger, is the jungle's greatest man-killer. Tiger lie up in dense jungle or in distant ravines, but the slothful, dull-witted, short-sighted,

bear, sleep where they feed. After a guzzling night on termites and jungle fruit, bear become dormant and may well be dead. Even the clumsy white man blundering through the jungles seldom rouses a slumbering bear till he treads on the unconscious beast. The light-footed Bhil, with all his awareness is at a greater disadvantage because of his noiseless approach, and the Bhil is lucky who breaks from an awakened bear with the loss of his scalp.

Some witty fellow said :

The bear was faster than the man,
And beat him by a yard.

An appropriate epitaph for many a Bhil.

Wolves are a menace to the Bhil child and I never cared to enter a village when the death-cry was raised. A cry that sobs out the news that a wolf pack has swept through and carried off a toddler or two.

These wild folk have developed an astonishing sense of smell, sight, and hearing. No Bhil requires to be told that an enemy has left hurriedly or that his girl-friend had to break from home. The wide spaced tracks of the enemy speak of a rapid get away and the girl's dainty footprints tell him that " Lally does not live here any More."

Here is a tale of footprints :

One afternoon, Varnia and I were heading for the shelter of a village. We were, in fact, making room for a bear who was in love and therefore particularly objectionable. Our path crossed a dry river and we noticed footprints of a man who had lately crossed and recrossed the sandy bed.

The inquisitive Varnia studied the tracks for a few minutes and then said : " He," pointing at the footprints, " is young and frightened. He is also a father and has lost his wife. Moreover, all within his village are filled with fear."

I had learned not to be surprised when Varnia read the jungle.

" How does such knowledge come to thee ? " I asked.

" Because the man ventured out to collect firewood and a few sticks fell by the way."

The footprints led to the village we were heading for. There we met the man and Varnia's observation proved to be correct.

When questioned, Varnia said his deductions were based on the fact that the man was carrying firewood, a woman's duty.

That was all and he guessed the rest.

Being burdened with firewood, proved he was a widower who had to prepare food for the family. For had his wife been ill or had she died a natural death, neighbours would have cared for the family while some woman collected fuel for all. The dawdling tracks clearly indicated that the man was preoccupied and the fact that he had to search for fuel proved that he was ostracised. Moreover, the footprints were not the splayed tracks of advancing age, therefore the man was young.

We were told that the man's wife died overnight of childbirth and all the village feared she might become a Churel.

That was the reason why he was ostracized.

My interest in aboriginal curatives quickened when Varnia assured me that cataract—an eye complaint, not a cascade—" is made to vanish " if virgin's milk is discharged into the afflicted eye.

" Virgin's milk ! " I exclaimed. My knowledge of female phenomena being superficial.

" Aye," he replied and added : " What is wrong with that ? "

" I don't know, but it seems to me that something must be wrong with that kind of girl, Varnia."

" Such girls," he said, " can be found when we meet with such as suffer from worms in the eye."

Noticing my puzzled look, he spat, toed the spittle into the sand, and then promised to produce the girl and the worm if we came across a worm in an eye.

Cataract is very common and although the milk-doners worked manfully, not one worm broke surface from the eye of any of our patients.

Was Varnia discouraged ? Not he ! Nor could his reason for failure be surpassed by physician or surgeon, for he had

the audacity to say: "Such worms are accustomed to come forth when overcome by the milk of a true virgin. They cannot remain concealed and I say, therefore, that none among all the girls were virgins."

Which helps to prove how little doctors differ, whether they be black or white.

It is not within me to feel discouraged if the future holds promise of excitement, but had I known of the close connection between jungle medicine and jungle law, I might have ceased to practice among aborigines. My second patient and my first client arrived together.

He briefed me while I was bandaging his bear bites and got me entangled in a depraved affair between three women and himself. I regret to remember that for some time after I disentangled their licentious tangle, one of the loosened women haunted my camp and claimed my protection because of some jungle custom. She became a nuisance and only left me when I threatened to reverse my judgment and return her to the original owner.

Comedy reigned in my court and I preferred to make it so.

For instance, viragos were ducked, roofs removed from usurer's huts, seducers had to keep the unfaithful wife—an embarrassing keepsake in a small village—slanderers were forbidden to speak for a week, and virgins who lowered their market value, lost their dowry.

I, too, felt tempted to shower pearls of wit on all who came before me. More especially on hefty women who often put up a brave defence before being ducked. My public would have laughed as heartily as ours laugh when a judge exercises that which passes for wit on some poor devil in mental agony. But I was not infected with the prevalent distemper of our law-courts and had not the heart to raise a laugh at the cost of some trembling wretch.

Serious offences were uncommon and, when I refused to deal with such, my decision was greeted with groans of disapproval from an audience who came to court for amusement.

It became a great game in which the accused selected the

jury, the jury empanelled themselves, and where a witness cost a penny—reliable ones expected a little more, of course.

During my long vacation, a time set aside for work, I was approached by a man who wished to put away his wife.

" That will be looked into later," I said peevishly.

" The matter cannot be delayed," he wailed.

Being a weak fellow, I wavered. Not because of the man's distress, but because putting a woman away has more than one meaning. One is the American equivalent of taking for a ride.

" What has she done ? " I asked.

" She has been unfaithful."

" For the first time ? "

Even a dog is allowed one bite, I thought, so why not overlook another man's woman's only disdemeanour.

" How canst a man tell if it be the first or many times ? " said he.

It seemed that he was passing the buck to me. A game I strongly deprecate among wild men. I therefore ordered him to summon his wife.

The news of an impending matrimonial scandal soon became known and Bhil after Bhil, accompanied by their women, trickled out of the neighbouring jungle and squatted round me while I sat on a tree stump and smoked my pipe thoughtfully.

To commence with, I made it clear to all that putting a women away meant returning her to her parents and not to her Gods.

The accused made an unfavourable impression on the court as she stood before me with arms akimbo and a shameful area of stomach exposed between bodice and skirt.

" How now ? " I said as she looked about aggressively.

" How now what ? " she replied impertinently.

When charged with adultery she smiled, but the smile altered to a frown when two young Bhils rose hurriedly and left.

" My man is a liar ! " she shrilled.

The women in the audience tittered in joyful anticipation and the men nudged one another excitedly.

The woman maintained she was innocent and the husband could not rebut her denials. I wondered how I could arrive at a correct decision, when circumstantial evidence had to be ruled out among a people who were prepared to produce direct evidence at a penny per witness. Further, it seemed as if the husband had been off the record for years, so my sympathy lay with the accused. I therefore told the woman not to do it again and dismissed the case. But when I saw her join the two youths, who had left the court hurriedly, I felt inclined to retry the case.

CHAPTER XI

Continence ; Continence among Women ; Original Brains Trust ; Popular Questions ; Opening Gambits ; General Disarmament ; An Angry Mother ; Offensive Questions ; Saved by a Friend ; Brains Trust is Dissolved.

LIKE all Bhils, Varnia disapproved of continence. He and his fellows looked upon a continent man as a coward, who only abstained from alcohol, drugs and other constitutional demands, for fear of God and priest. Which made me wonder if continence is linked with cowardice. One wonder led to another and I found myself wondering if the proverb : " None but the brave deserve the fair," is intended to mean that only the importunate merit success.

As for continence among women—here is the Bhil view. The Bhils declare that continence among women is a dog-gonned, selfish condition and, in order to make women less pernickety, they also affirm that the maid who remains in so selfish a condition cannot hope to acquire breasts.

A man-made fear, I suppose.

It occurred to me that women might have something to say about continence and I therefore called a meeting of both sexes, hoping to hear something about continence in general and among women in particular.

Incidentally, ours was the original Brains Trust. We were, however, far too modest to claim such an impudent sobriquet and were content to be known as the Swap Thoughts.

When it became known that a Swap Thought meeting was in the offing, many elderly Bhils, who pined for paid recognition, claimed the right to reply to all questions and to be known as Resident Members. They based their claim on senility and were justly reprimanded for impudence.

No subject was barred, nor were there any restrictions, till it became necessary to disarm both sexes prior to a meeting.

That happened later.

It is interesting to recall some of the more popular questions shouted at these meetings. To commence with, continence in general was never discussed. Continence for all affected men, and they were not prepared to argue about a popular diversion which suited all males. No objections were raised against other questions. These included religion, politics, superstitions, marriage, divorce, infanticide, disease and many celes, such as varico and hydro. I need hardly add that the facts of life became a perennial subject. Raised at all meetings, it held an audience who hoped to hear some thing scandalous about their neighbours, rather than gather information.

The primary object of these meetings was to solve knotty problems, but sly complaints, disguised as questions, had to be considered and quarrels deferred, amicably if possible.

Comparisons are seldom odious, if interesting.

For, unlike the Brains Trust, our Swap Thoughts were not picked out of a hat, puggri, brassière or lioncloth. Any member of the audience could rise, take the floor and be forgotten as soon as he or she had expressed their views. And our Swap Thoughts never opened the great Guessing Game with such feeble feelers as :

" But surely— ? "

" Unless I'm mistaken—"

" Do you not think ? "

" I'm willing to be corrected, but—"

" If I remember aright—"

Such pappy openings would have started a riot. The audience expected strong meat and were prepared to fight for it. Before entering the arena our members acquired a pugnacious stance, and—till disarmed—fingered their weapons as they strode forward. The great game of guesswork invariably commenced with threatening gambits, such as:

" I say this— "

" Let him come forth who thinks to disbelieve— "

" Who among ye knoweth more than I ? "

" If any likes me not after I have spoken, I will— "

Such belligerent openings impressed all and silenced those who came to argue.

The cause of the general disarmament was a woman, whose vitriolic tongue angered a Bhil squatting within bow-shot. We could not find the culprit because his pals refused to give him away, but when the tumult and the shouting died down the barb of an arrow was recovered from the vixen's stern.

Our meetings were held in moonlight glades where the audience squatted on their hunkers in a circle and looked like a pack of wolves with shining eyes and flashing teeth. All the Elders wanted to be the Question-Master, so we settled that difficulty by having none. Generally speaking, women asked questions, men replied, and women had the last word. That arrangement added pep to the conversation, quarrel or argument. It did not take me long to find that the subjects of general interest were food, desire, drink and death. Excusable perhaps, when one remembers that all the needful Bhil expects is a little food, a little love, lots of drink and an early death.

Among the Bhils the only non-vulgar equivalent for the facts of life is, that which happens, and that which happens or the facts of life, was the cause of an ugly scene at one meeting.

A full-breasted wide-beamed woman shouted: " What should befall the man who seduces a young girl ? "

A straightforward question from an angry mother. A

trifle too straightforward for some of the men who fingered the sand nervously or rose and left the meeting. The women looked expectantly at the men, who shrugged their shoulders and seemed to imply that that which is said to be worse than death was a trivial matter and not worth consideration. The angry mother behaved as mothers will when an elderly Bhil, a foolish fellow, told her that her daughter was a victim of the facts of life.

It took time and men to prize the infuriated woman from off the elderly Bhil and he had aged considerably by then.

Two unprovoked opening gambits caused minor riots and several scalp wounds before I could interfere and separate the belligerents.

In one case a disgruntled man strode into the ring, eyed an inoffensive looking couple, and shouted: " From the leaf of a tree one can judge the trees in the jungle, I have therefore but to look at ye both to set a value on thy daughter's morals."

The enraged couple and their relatives fell on the disgruntled man, who tried to defend himself before disappearing beneath an avalanche of arms, legs and skirts.

In the other case an unkempt virago pointed at a young man and his sister and screamed: " One does not speak of a rope in the household of a man whose father has been hung, so I will say no more of thy sister who was raped."

Cain was raised when some one said that all women should be continent at all times.

All wanted to say what they thought about a subject which affected so many and all shouted simultaneously. I expected to see the women band together against the men. But, intuition may have warned them to determine such an inequitable imposition with their nearest and dearest, before dealing with those whose opinions were more or less immaterial.

In the circumstances, battles patricidal, matricidal and fractricidal, raged around me. Above the din of battle, I heard shouts of:

" If thee, why not me ? "

" Women are weak ! "

" Men are unjust ! "

" If it be allowed among men, then we women—"

" If we allow women to become loose, then—"

" Are we women without feeling, then ? "

" And why should'st thee, thou wicked old man ? "

And a gem from a determined man, fighting a losing cause against half a dozen female relatives. He shrieked : " If women are granted but a hare's whisper, the tiger's roar is her's also ! "

Reason placed me among the men, my feelings with the women.

This question created a record, for the subject continued to be fought out long after the members decided to break off and return to their huts. As they limped or crawled away, distant voices could be heard arguing about it and about, till silenced by the jungle's soft whisperings.

Some days later I asked Varnia if his people had come to any agreement on the subject. " The same as before," he replied cheerfully.

" And that is ? "

" The women continue to be watched and the men are agreed that that which happens, happens."

No further Swap Thoughts meetings were held. I was the cause and this the reason.

Unlike many men, who brag about their sense of humour and lyingly claim that they like being laughed at, ridicule frets my bowels and makes my dandruff rise.

My humiliation commenced soon after we assembled for—as it turned out—our last meeting. I sensed an air of expectancy among many women who had bunched together for the first time in our jungle philanderings. What now ? I thought, as my eyes gazed at their shapely figures garbed in gay trappings. According to custom, the women asked, and the men echoed questions which women usually whisper to one another. On this occasion, the women appeared to be shy and were silent, till a bold hoyden beckoned to an old

Bhil who sidled up and listened to their excited babblings. The old fellow then stood and said: "The women ask why the sahib's heart remains like unto a stone, while his eyes delight to linger among bosoms which yearn to soften his heart? Can it be said that the sahib is no man?"

Feeling humiliated by inference, I hung my head like a bashful virgin. Although an apt retort seldom occurs to me at the right moment, my reply might have been spirited and suitable at any other place and time. Alas! my stock depreciated rapidly, till Varnia, my would-be champion, leapt to his feet and shouted angrily: "Fools, all!" Know ye not that my sahib is like unto a bull-elephant?"

I winced.

"I tell thee that, I, Varnia, have oft restrained him from rushing into a village and ravishing the maidens therein. I warn all women that there is no man like unto him in vigour. He is the equal of three men or more. Beware, I say. For even now he may be overtaken by musth and such women who came to jest, will suffer exceedingly."

(Musth is a seasonal condition which affects male elephants and is more pronounced when Spring is in the air.)

It was unkind of the well-meaning Varnia to confound me with bull elephants and suffering, but the "Wah! Wahs!" of collective admiration helped to restore my equanimity. And because I feared that I might some day be called upon to justify Varnia's exaggerated claims on my behalf, I liquidated the Swap Thoughts forthwith.

Judging, however, from the women's concerned glances, it was obvious that I might have to look beneath the counter for girl-friends of the future.

I am not ungenerous.

I therefore pray the Brains Trust may not find themselves in a similar predicament—some day.

CHAPTER XII

Brahmin Priest; A Charm; Unpleasant Instructions; Wild Men; A Smelly Journey; A Privy Search; Bhil Ablutions; Diffident Police; Suspicious Men; The Power of a Charm; A Sorrowful Return.

A WHITE-ROBED Brahmin priest hurried down the steps of a State temple and saluted me with an arresting salaam.

An unusual occurrence.

I returned his salaam and asked: "O Holy man, why salaam me?"

Not an unnatural request, as Brahmins hold Christians in contempt and usually ignore a race who have shorn them of power.

He smiled faintly and said: "There are many hopes in despair."

Which meant he was in trouble and I was one hope.

"Why approach a Christian?"

"A spear is only sharp at one end," he replied.

I laughed. He wanted me to know that although he exercised considerable power, even he had certain limitations.

Mine, a laugh of understanding, was mistaken for derision.

He spat contemptuously and said angrily: "Fools laugh at a priest in trouble."

I wished to help, but his impertinence annoyed me, so I mocked him with a popular bazaar jingle.

Priests in trouble
And troublesome priests.
How do they differ?
These supplicant beasts.

He scowled.

It was tactless to laugh, therefore I said soothingly: "Forgive, O Holy One. Laughter cleanseth the breath. Wherefore did'st I laugh. Speak, and my aid is thine."

He then said he wished to acquire a plot of land adjoining the temple, but had quarrelled with the Diwan, who refused to transfer the coveted area to the temple authorities. Both were Brahmins, but the Diwan was also the Prime Minister and therefore held the aces in this pack of trouble.

A typical example of autocratic peevishness.

"Will ye speak for me in the ear of the Diwan?" he asked anxiously.

I intended to help but wanted to hear a Brahmin's reaction to Christian interference in matters ecclesiastical.

"Why should I, a Christian, aid thee in the matter of a Hindu temple?" I asked, pretending to be puzzled.

"Because only the powerful are merciful."

Brahmin priests have all the answers.

I knew the Diwan wanted to enlarge his residence to accommodate an overflow of women and could not do so without permission. I therefore called on him.

"Diwan sahib," I said smilingly, "which will ye sacrifice? Thy pride in the matter of that small area of land desired by the priest, or the comfort of thy household?"

The priest won.

A few days later, the grateful priest gave me a charm about the size of a half crown and which looked like a fragment of calcined amber.

One may look a gift horse in the mouth in India, so I said suspiciously: "What is this thing?"

"A charm, sahib."

" What use have I for charms ? "

" Keep it carefully," he said earnestly, " for it will protect thee from fever and make thee pleasing in the sight of women."

Alas !

I still have to take quinine.

Dum spiro spero. (Latin for, the older I get, the less I learn).

As I fingered the charm hopefully, its prophylactic value seemed to be eclipsed by visions of lovely women competing for my affections.

The priest's parting words were: " The charm will surprise thee."

" It is not I who wish to be surprised," I said glumly.

" It will surprise women, too," he added.

" That's better ! ' I exclaimed, and pocketed the gift.

" One word of warning," he whispered.

" Say the word, then."

" 'Tis wise to take no heed of what one hears on a pillow."

" If pillows come my way, O Holy One, thy words shall not be forgotten."

I thought of surprising the women in the station with the aid of the charm and decided not to as it seemed such an unsporting method of approach. Like potting a sitting bird.

Nor could I ensure wisdom by taking no heed of the chit-chat on a pillow. The women in the States had no use for pillows and the seductor who attempts to exercise his hobby in a small station must be particularly brazen.

So, very reluctantly and, because there seemed to be no alternative, I placed the charm in my despatch box and trusted that the steel container might damp its activity till I needed help.

Some weeks later, I had occasion to exercise the love-philtering amulet and the ruddy thing unbuttoned me.

Colquhoun, my chief, a proper man, hemp to the core and cable laid, was on leave at this time and another Political Agent, a diminutive, cocksure little chap who differed from my gigantic chief as he differed in stature, was in temporary

charge of the States. My new chief disliked me at sight and as I never could disguise my feelings, we avoided each other and toured the States separately. Thereafter my trips to the jungles became more frequent and further opportunities came my way of getting to know that extraordinary superstitious race, the Bhils.

While I was on tour in the States, Tich, my new chief, ordered me to return forthwith to Rajpur to undertake some unspecified job. On my return, Tich raised my suspicions by the hedging way in which he approached the subject. After telling me that the Government were holding an exhibition of arts and crafts at Pagalbad, a large cantonment and headquarters of the province, he embarrassed me by the fulsome way in which he complimented me on my knowledge of the Bhils. He then congratulated me on being the only white man the Bhils trusted and increased my suspicions by assuring me that Peeler, the policeman, a wily fellow, held similar views. It struck me that Tich was too polite to be straight.

Therefore, although I felt suitably flattered, my suspicions made me ask Tich if his sole reason in recalling me was to compliment me on my affection for the Bhils. He flushed and asked, somewhat diffidently, if I was prepared to collect a contingent of Bhils and convoy them to the exhibition at Pagalbad. He added that he would consider it a personal favour, but omitted to say that the Indian Government had urged the heads of departments to be particularly assiduous in their endeavours to broaden the aboriginal mind—stuffing the bloody pagan's heads with clap-trap, was Peeler's translation of the Governmental urge—and would I, in short, take on the job as Peeler could not be spared.

Tich disagreed with my sanguinary description of Peeler, whose cunning usually enabled him to avoid undertakings which appeared unpleasant. But Tich was grateful to all who fell in with his wishes and he nearly kissed me when I reluctantly agreed to chaperon a party of wild men.

It formed no part of my duties to conduct half-wild, semi-naked men to exhibitions, but I am susceptible to flattery and I wished to try out the charm on the ladies at Pagalbad.

I then left for the club where I tried to look into the future through the bottom of a tumbler.

Apart from the fact that " me and my Bhils " would probably become one of the principal exhibits at the exhibition, the immediate problem was to persuade a party of frightened men to do a little sightseeing in—to them—a foreign country.

My fourth or fifth glimpse into the future, convinced me that persuasion was out of the question. Having reached that decision I despatched an orderly to warn some thirty Bhils to be prepared to accompany me to Pagalbad.

On the appointed day I set out to collect the men.

As I expected, I found the disconsolate fellows surrounded by weeping women and howling children who despaired of seeing their loved ones again. None believed me when I assured them that all would be back within a month. The prolonged farewells were trying, so I beckoned to a forlorn body of men who girded up their loins with wisps of cloth and followed me to the accompaniment of wails from widowing women and shrieks of children now fatherless.

It was a two day march to the nearest railway station.

That evening, after the men had fed and were settling down beside their camp fires, an elderly Bhil sidled to my camp-bed and whispered: " What be the meaning of this journey, sahib ? "

" To witness a great tamasha " (entertainment).

" That we have been told. But which among us is to be the tamasha ? "

" What mean ye ? "

" This," and he squatted beside me with a handful of pebbles to illustrate his meaning. " Some say, all of us," he trickled the pebbles through his fingers to represent the whole party, " Others say, but one," he picked up a pebble,

" will be slaughtered to make a great tamasha for the sahib-logue at Pagalbad."

" Fear not," I said soothingly. " I give thee my word that ere the moon fills ye all will be back among thy own folk."

" Uninjured, sahib ? "

" Assuredly ! "

" The Gods grant it may be so," he muttered and shuffled back to his fire.

None of the men had seen a train and when the engine hissed into the wayside station all stampeded like frightened animals and disappeared into the surrounding jungle.

" God ! " I exclaimed as I watched the last loin-cloth waggling like the butt-end of a rabbit.

Trains wait for white men in India. I therefore ordered the station staff to help me to round up my men. An hour passed before we collected the scared men and then began the fantastic problem of trying to persuade them that the railway carriage was not a trap on wheels.

After demonstrating that the seats were made to sit on, I got out and made for a first class compartment, but the men thought I intended to desert them and out they scrambled through doors and windows and clustered round me on the platform.

My thoughts turned to the Bible and I muttered angrily : ' Rid me and deliver me from the hands of strange children ' who are becoming a ruddy nuisance.

Eventually, and much to my disgust, for I possess a sensitive nose, I entered their carriage for fear of provoking another stampede. Thus for one long day and part of a stifling night I moped among the sweating men and thought murderously of Tich.

The men took no interest in the country, but when a stranger tried to enter the carriage they fingered their arrows and the would-be passenger sought a safer seat.

The carriage was not provided with a lavatory. When my lawful occasions demanded one and I detrained at stations

to search privily, thirty armed men followed to see what I was up to.

No spinster, not even in her most delectable day-dreams ever contemplated such a following of solicitous men.

Amused station masters telegraphed the news of our progress to their friends and many curious railwaymen met the train, hoping to be entertained by my performing Bhils. But Bhils are no respecters of people or places and the laugh was not always with the station staff. For when my wild men set about their lawful occasions, the hastily enlisted sanitary squads were thankful to see the last of us.

At one halt, a prosperous looking vendor thrust a basket of sweets through the window and beneath the nose of a young Bhil.

" Lo bunder " (Take monkey) he invited mockingly.

With a swing of an arm the youngster swept the contents across the carriage. A few seconds later every Bhil was munching contentedly.

" Who will pay for my loss ? " yelled the angry vendor.

" He," I said, pointing at the culprit.

" But Bhils are jungle folk and without money."

" Why then did'st thou ask him to take ? Saying take, monkey ! "

" To amuse those who were assembled to mock the monkey folk."

" The jest left thy house for ours," the culprit chortled and wiped his mouth with the back of a hand.

I declined to interfere.

After dark, the red signal lamps caused much trouble. Red is the favoured colour of the jungle Gods and the train had to be delayed while I prized worshippers off signal posts and point indicators. When the signals were lowered and the red altered to green, the scared men prayed to be allowed to return to the jungles for never before had their Gods been known to change colour.

We detrained at Pagalbad about midnight and, while I dined in the refreshment-room, thirty pairs of beady eyes

stared through the windows and watched every mouthful. Then, weary, dishevelled and apprehensive of what might happen, I flung myself on my camp-bed and tried to sleep amidst a crowd of wakeful men who fidgeted with weapons.

Just before I fell asleep, my subconscious mind—a neological phrase coined by savants to keep others guessing—persuaded me that distance lends enchantment to the Bhil. Dawn brought Bhil ablutions and confirmed my subconscious something, for then I became involved with the Indian station master who truculently opposed the cleansing of the tribes beneath the water column. He feared that the tribes intended to disregard the unfeeling bye-law that implores all and sundry to " commit no nuisance here ".

His fears were justified.

But he made a grave mistake when he abused men who were highly nervous and in no mood to be bothered about. However, the station master retreated hastily and locked himself in the station office when a couple of angry Bhils stalked him from behind a row of railway wagons.

Our destination, a temporary camp built for the men, lay through the bazaar and off we went in single file through narrow streets, followed by a mob of excited men, women, children, and howling pi dogs. A teeming bazaar was a new experience and the Bhils loosened their arrows and walked warily so as not to be taken by surprise.

The dogs were easily disposed of. They retreated and remained at howling distance when blunted arrows, reserved for birds, bounced along their ribs.

Sedate merchants, alarmed by the clamour of the crowd, scuttled behind their wares and anxious mothers swept babes from the path of my armed procession of barefooted men. Swaggering braves, who were out to admire and be admired, lost their assurance and edged into shops when we came in view. Even the police, the accepted tyrants in all bazaars, became strangely diffident when they rushed forward to quell a riot and found that the riot was prepared to stand no

opposition in their anxiety to get quit of the bazaar. To quicken the pace I tried to keep at the head of the file, but the men were far too nervous to be hurried in such dangerous surroundings. They advanced slowly, peered round corners, hesitated before crossing alley ways, and turned about to face imaginary dangers.

I must have looked like a harrassed sheep dog, as I kept running back to hurry the men by tweaking ears, thumping backs, and kneeing bare bottoms. And though I barked till I was hoarse I could not persuade myself to take a sly nip at a bottom or two.

For the greater part of the time the last man in the file delayed progress by walking backwards to face the interested spectators. Whenever he turned about and raced back to rejoin the procession, the rest panicked and crowded round me.

And so we concertinered along till we reached our destination.

It pleased me to find how well the camp was provisioned with food, water, milk, and sweets, but the suspicious men refused to eat a particle of such unaccustomed luxuries unless I tasted a little of everything. I offered up a silent prayer to Aesculapius for protection before sipping typhoid milk and munching microbic food, and then drove to the Officers' Mess in a passing tonga. A few explanatory words with the Adjutant and I was made an honorary member of the mess and given the run of his bungalow.

That is my army.

I was a stranger, who expected and obtained the hospitality of the regiment. I am not prepared to swear that the Adjutant asked no questions. He did. He required to be assured that I had not been connected with trade and was suitably impressed by an indignant denial. He assumed, with marked diffidence and exaggerated jocularity, that my father had not served behind a counter. When satisfied that neither father nor son had lost caste by dabbling in trade he took me to his bosom.

Before dining in the mess, I visited the camp to see how the men were getting on and found it deserted. The watchman informed me that the men were afraid to sleep in the huts and took to the surrounding jungle after a hurried meal.

On the following morning I collected and lectured my circus of dishevelled men. Commencing with the correct adjustment of loin-cloths, I implored the men to refrain from taloning groins, scratching behinds, spitting, hawking, and belching when in public, and I threatened to flay the man who omitted to seek cover when necessary. I did not beseech them to behave in public as they were accustomed to behave at home. That would have suited men, who I prayed might forget their homish tricks for the time. Then, feeling as apprehensive as the men looked, I led off followed by thirty dejected men in single file.

The exhibits were housed in large marquees, the doors of which were screened by split bamboo chicks. These light chicks or screens can be rolled up or down, like some safety curtains in theatres. Intended to keep out flies, the Bhils thought the chicks were trapdoors and backed away in alarm, so I had to lead the way before a man dared to enter. Then all scrambled in and clustered around me, sweating with fear. Whenever we entered a marquee, dainty women and strong men sniffed enquiringly and hurried out with handkerchiefs pressed to noses and anti-Bhil looks.

I have no doubt that "me and my Bhils" helped to promote the white discontent which was so prevalent in India at the time.

Few of the exhibits interested the men, but we wandered dutifully from marquee to marquee for six wearisome days with little profit to the men.

The nightly fireworks were a great success and evoked much applause among the astonished men who had not seen a firework display. I regret to state, however, that the sight of red rockets flaming overhead, caused heretical emotions which would have wrung tears from the Godly had they seen the Bhils prostrating themselves in fearful acknowledgment

of some new kind of scarlet demon. After each display, the Bhils begged to be allowed to buy a few red rockets for home consumption. They offered to credit me with skins, antlers, and mhowa liquor, but I felt I had already been a godsend in adding a Signal God or two to their malevolence of Gods and declined to gratify their craving for further Gods.

Because I did the right thing by calling on all who were call-on-able, invitations to dinner and dances poured in. With the Adjutant's assistance I accepted invitations where the young are likely to be present and refused to be a party to the semi-official functions, where women make for the scandal-room after dinner and leave the men to grumble about promotion, nepotism, and the next spot of leave.

I was delighted with the power of the charm. Delighted and surprised to find how extraordinarily popular I became among the women. Nothing, it seemed, was too good for me. If I asked a girl to dance, she accepted with gratifying alacrity. And when my partner and I returned from poodle-faking in the dark, I smirked to see the envious looks of men who glowered jealously. Curiously enough, many of the men were equally anxious to please me and some gave me the run of their stables when I was invited to play polo.

I did not credit the charm for all that occurred at Pagalbad. Indeed, I was tempted to feel that the women in Rajpur were unable to perceive that something about me which was so obvious to their more discerning sisters at Pagalbad. A transfer to Pagalbad seemed desirable and I determined to make it so.

My last evening, being guest-night at the mess, I dined in. The night became cheerful soon after the senior officers departed and took with them the decorum and gloom that accompanies age and seniority. Ageing warriors are inclined to forget that an officers' mess is a subalterns' creche.

When the last of the guests had sunk several " last ones " and " one for the road," the Adjutant and I returned to his bungalow to drink a couple of finals before turning in.

" By Jove ! " I exclaimed from the depths of a chair, " I'd give a lot to be stationed here."

" Why ? " said he.

" Because of the women, of course."

" Your popularity surprised you ? "

" Not exactly. It was gratifying, nevertheless."

" I must admit," he said quietly, " that it surprised some of us to see how the skirts fell for you. I meant to say it surprised me—at first," he added and grinned.

I raised my eyebrows.

" But," he continued, " when my favourite filly cut me to dance with you, it made me chew the cud of reflection."

" Things like that happen, you know," I said soothingly.

" True ! But when things like that happen there is usually a very good reason.

" Yes ? "

" You, as you know, command some of the best shooting in the country. Every man in the station, my filly's dad included, is longing for an invitation to shoot with you. They therefore encouraged their women to make a fuss of you."

I felt crushed.

" Hoping," and I took the words from his mouth, " that I might invite their men to some of the best shooting in India ? "

" Exactly ! "

On the following morning "me and my Bhils" entrained and, during the return journey, I asked the men to tell me what interested them at the exhibition.

" The fireworks ! " they exclaimed.

" What next ? "

" The white tiger skin." (An albino tiger skin that attracted much attention).

" Anything else ? "

" The little man in the box ! "

" The what ? "

" The little man, no larger than a pigeon, who sang in a box."

I laughed. The little man was a gramophone. We had, it seemed, broadened the aboriginal mind.

But I felt miserable and my unhappiness spread among the men till I took the charm from my pocket.

They became interested then and nudged one another as they watched me twiddling my lost hopes between my fingers. Their excitement caused me to ask if they had seen anything like it.

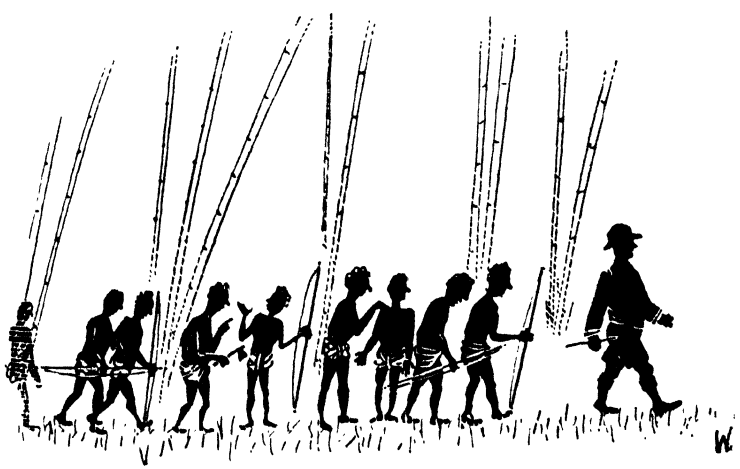
" Aye, sahib."

" But," asked one of the elder men, " why should'st thou, who art young, have need for such ? "

" What has youth to do with this thing ? "

" 'Tis a sure protection against impotence," he replied without batting an eyelid, and I flicked the unnecessary rejuvenizer through the window.

The men arrived back safely and their reception eclipsed the return of the Prodigal Son. The Prodigal Son limped home from a sounder of swine, whereas my Bhils returned from the dead.



CHAPTER XIII

Improving the East; Bachelor's Disease; Growing a Servant; A Factory; Explosive Bottles; Curative Contemplation; An Aerated Pharmacy; A Woman by Night; A Virtuous Relapse; Arrested Servant.

AS I mused in bed one Sunday morning, a flick of the mind set me thinking, Why should I not try to improve the East? And by the East I meant my servants. It was hinted that no Indian dared to call on me unless he had tipped a servant or two. I therefore decided to take immediate action against a set of bandits who posed as servants, but before remonstrating with them I placed a supple cane in the verandah and explained its use. My bandits became servants and the cane was never used.

Another matter that required looking into was the interior economy of my household.

Here again I tried to improve the East, but had I endeavoured to unravel the famous rope-trick I could not have failed more signally.

It is sufficiently annoying to find that white ants, fish insects and the climate, destroy one's belongings, but when all such are deliberately damaged by servants, murder is justifiable.

It may be incredible, but it is clearly understood among all Indian servants that furnishing and equipment, such as towels, sheets, shoes, clothes, napery, kitchen utensils, saddlery and gardening tools, need to be repaired every month. Should the stoutest material show no sign of wear at the end of a month, a stitch is eased and the offending article is produced, in order to prove that a stitch in time is a stitch a month.

Repairs take place in the bazaar and the artful servant collects his rake-off from tinker, tailor and cobbler.

For the same reason, horses require to be shod and kitchen utensils treated with a fine coating of tin once every month.

Being a zealous reformer, I refused to allow my horses to be shod or my pots and pans to be tinned at the whim of syce or cook and said so very forcibly. But soon after my courageous stand, and, at the time appointed by my syce, my horses became lame.

" How comes it," I stormed, " that all my horses become lame at the same moment ? "

The syce looked pained and questioned me. " Why should they not get lame on the same day ? Were they not shod at the same time ?

I could not prove he had injured my horses in order to get his way. So, for the sake of the gees I gave in and allowed them to be shod every month.

The syce won.

My cook was my next antagonist. He waited to see how the syce fared before he forced me to be reasonable in the matter of tinning his pots and pans.

Soon after the syce defeated me, my stomach commenced to ache. A formidable dose of bicarbonate banished the pain, but it returned after each meal. Instead of asking Dr Wazir Ali to guess what was wrong, I did the guessing and placed myself on a milk diet. But when the pain increased, I sent for Dr Wazir Ali.

" What's the trouble ? " he asked.

Suppressing an inclination to tell him that that was exactly what I wished to know, I said : " I don't know, but my belly has ached for days."

" Passing blood ? "

" Of course ! "

" Why, of course ? "

" Because that seems to be the predominating symptom of every disease in this ruddy country."

A few searching questions ruled out most of India's bowel complaints.

" I believe," he said, " you are suffering from Bachelor's Disease.

" Rot ! " I exclaimed indignantly.

He smiled. " Batchelor's Disease " is not synonymous for V.D."

" What is it, then ? "

" A form of diarrhœa, due to filthy kitchens and filthier pots and pans."

" God's Strewth, Doc ! " I exclaimed, " are you in that racket, too ? "

" I don't understand," he said stiffly.

I told him of the trouble with my cook.

His eyes narrowed and he looked serious. " Do you mind if I question your cook ? " he asked.

When the cook arrived, Wazir Ali eyed him for a few seconds and then said bluntly : " What is the name of the poison that thou art placing in thy master's food ? "

" Why should I poison my master ? " the cook replied sulkily.

Wazir Ali said sternly : " I asked thee to name the poison ; the reason why it was placed in thy master's food is a matter for the police."

The lower class Indian, whether guilty or not, who does not wilt when the police is mentioned, is rare.

Wazir Ali startled me, but my cook paled and confessed that he placed small portions of datura (thorn-apple) in my food and hoped that I might think I was suffering from verdigris poisoning because my copper pots and pans were not tinned every month.

Thereafter all my kitchen utensils were regularly covered with a thin coating of tin, and my cook won.

It was then that I decided to grow a servant to my own plans and specifications. A servant who would scorn to take bribes and be an example to my horde of banditti.

I toyed with the idea of growing a girl servant, as female

influence—a nebulous sedative—seemed to be desirable about my bungalow, and because I imagined that women were more loyal.

So I believed, but I was younger then.

My mental picture was a silk clad, charming young thing, who placed my morning tea beside my bed and then whispered: "Ub kiya?" (what now) while waiting for instructions, before tripping away to prepare my bath. She, I imagined, would put an end to petty pilfering, darn socks, replace missing buttons and do such things as women are expected to do about a bungalow.

The temptation was great, but I abandoned the idea of employing a girl servant for two excellent reasons. First, because no man with a low flash-point should play with fire; and because of a verse in the Book of Proverbs which says warningly: "Who can find a virtuous woman?"

My flash-point is low; I like playing with fire; and I'm the unlucky kind of bloke who would be saddled with a Nun.

So I plumped for a boy.

On looking round the servants' quarters for a likely looking lad who could be pruned and trained to become an exemplary servant—one from my loins, so to speak—the lot fell upon Uri, the eight year son of my aged and very respectable syce. A glance told me that Uri could be trained, but who could prune a lad whose chin only reached the level of the dining table? Summoning Uri's father, I said: "Thy son takes service with me from this day at a wage of three rupees a month. Tell the woman of thy household (it is considered bad form to name a man's wife) to clothe thy son as befits a sahib's house, and here be ten rupees to purchase such as he may need."

"Huzoor!" exclaimed the obedient father, folding his hands humbly, and the deal was closed.

A few days after Uri's compulsory enrolment, his father, who had served as a mule driver in the Army Service Corps, approached me with the news that his son's equipment had

been purchased and would I lower my dignity by attending a kit inspection near the servants' quarters.

It was an admirable parade, with Uri standing stiffly to attention, but the effect was marred by the rapt way in which he gazed at his possessions and his marked inattention to myself, the kit inspection officer.

Unlike army inspections, where every possible subterfuge is employed to confuse the inexperienced officer, suggestions and even criticism were welcomed by the proud father, who pointed at garments, spoke of their cost and explained their use. A turban proudly displaying a metal disc engraved with my crest (a contribution from me) might have been overlooked had not the watchful Uri unbent from attention and pointed at it with his toe. Slippers, socks and linen garments were admired in turn and I was about to dismiss the parade when I noticed a small bottle and asked what it contained. " Kohl sahib," the father replied as he handed me the bottle.

" And for what purpose does a man-child require a woman's cosmetic ? " I asked suspiciously.

" To beautify the eyes when he enters thy presence," adding sheepishly : " 'Twas his mother's whim."

" Whim, or no whim," I said sternly, " away with the rubbish. I need a servant and not a painted boy. Listen now, and eat these words with the appetite of remembrance. If ever thy son enters my presence looking like a harlot or smelling of attar of rose, I'll—I'll—."

I could not complete the threat as I had to turn aside to hide a smile at the look of consternation on the child's face. As for threatening to cane that innocent looking little whisp of apparent cherbuism—it could not be done.

So I thought at the time. But I did not then know that the angelic little fellow who gazed at me with large dark eyes, contained a unusual quantity of essential oil of Satan.

That was sprung on me later and by the little devil himself.

On the following morning, clothed in spotless garments and barely able to support an enormous turban, Uri, prompted

by his father, who remained out of sight, whispered shyly: " Sahib, Sahib, Arise. Five o'clock is passed."

Seeing my eyelids flicker, he clutched at the unaccustomed turban and fled from the room for further instructions.

" Huzoor," he whispered a few minutes later. " May a man enter ? "

" Enter," I replied smiling sleepily.

He edged into the room, placed an empty tray on the table beside my bed, salaamed gravely and left.

In all he had to make six trips to bring me a teapot, milk jug, sugar-basin, cup and saucer, and buttered toast. He could not be trusted with a full tray load. With a final salaam he left the room and I heard him ask his father: " What now ? "

During the lad's apprenticeship I often felt inclined to discontinue the experiment of growing a servant and Uri was periodically dismissed, but like all weak men I relented at the sight of a sobbing little figure who laid his turban at my feet when he came to salaam me for the last time.

The lad seemed to be composed of faults. His assurance when he called at neighbouring bungalows to demand the loan of crockery, tea, sugar, or other commodities, incensed my women friends and brought me chits of indignant protest. But his escapades in the bazaar, where he purchased sweets, kites and marbles in my name, infuriated me till I put an end to the practise.

It might transfer all sympathy to Uri if I explained how he was persuaded to discontinue this practise, so it will be sufficient to say it was ended.

On one occasion, Uri embarked on a particularly bold marauding expedition in the bazaar. He came under the notice of the police and the last I saw of the child—for some hours—was a tiny figure, streaking for home on a pair of twinkling legs with the police in hot pursuit. He evaded his pursuers by the length of his streaming turban and locked himself in his father's quarters. There he remained till the

grinning police departed with threats of the gallows, shooting, burning the building down, and slow strangulation.

" But it was a near thing," he whispered as he lowered the wick of my lantern after bedding me down for the night.

" Thou must have misbehaved grossly to have caused so much ill-will among the police," I said sleepily.

" A man must defend his honour," he explained loftily and added : " More especially when among women in the bazaar."

" What then was the measure of thy defence ? " I asked.

" Because I am small, it had to be abuse. It is in my mind sahib, that had I been but a few years older, the gali would have been exchanged for a stick."

" Go ! " I yelled.

" Salaam, sahib," he said gravely and departed.

It was only a matter of time before Uri became an autocrat and ordered the other servants about with a flow of abuse that astounded me. His accusing finger pointed out many of the things that ought to have been done, but many of the things that ought not to have been done about the bungalow would have passed unnoticed had not Uri ferreted out the culprit and brought him to me. He, on the other hand, confined himself to interesting jobs, such as cleaning guns, polishing hog-spears or burnishing the bright parts of saddlery and conveniently forgot the work he was paid to do.

He seemed determined to shirk his way through life from a very early age.

That he became an autocrat among the servants caused no resentment, because Indians are devoted to children and suffer them exceeding greatly. But when he tried to bully my friends' servants, he became intolerable and brought confusion to my household.

In India, one is judged by the food one eats.

The gourmand commands respect, whereas the unhappy abstainer is belittled as a mean anæmic.

Uri was aware of such food-values and raised my standard of living to unprecedented heights by his preposterous

demands. When I dined out, with Uri in attendance, he caused chaos in the pantry by refusing to serve me on the grounds that the food provided by my host was not the kind of food that I was accustomed to eat. If the roast happened to be saddle of mutton, he calmly informed the butler that I lived on venison and mutton was unknown in our household, except when purchased for the dogs. He was even more offensive in the matter of drinks. Should whisky be the normal drink, Uri demanded an unknown brand of wine he called lal shirab (red liquor) for my sole consumption. And it often distressed me to be served with toast Melba while other guests had to be content with bread.

Such wilful behaviour might have passed unnoticed had Uri been a standard servant. But he was too small to escape notice. When he emerged from the pantry with a dish held above his head, the guests watched as he elbowed his way past the other servants and slid the dish before me.

It was no use remonstrating with the lad. That only hurt him. For whenever I tried to alter his ways, his eyes welled with reproachful tears and he moaned: "Did I not give orders for special food and drink for thy greater honour, huzoor?"

When I fell ill with malaria, Uri unrolled his little sleeping mat and lay at the foot of my bed in a state of sleepy wakefulness for fear he might be required. If Uri thought, and he often did, that Dr Wazir Ali seemed neglectful, he ordered a relief servant to look after me during his absence and trotted off to fetch the doctor. After warning Wazir Ali that I was unconscious, a lie, of course, Uri demanded his immediate service, coupled with the threat that unless Wazir Ali came at once, Uri was prepared to sit on his doorstep and proclaim to all who passed how shockingly the doctor neglected his patients.

Wazir Ali complained, almost tearfully at times: "I dare not disbelieve the young swine for fear he might be speaking the truth, but I wish you would try to prevent him from summoning me unnecessarily."

I did not consider it part of my duty to interfere in the usual quarrel between doctor and nurse. Nor was I prepared to suffer Uri's reproachful looks by reprimanding him for his anxiety about me.

So I lay low and said nothing.

Uri came to me one morning with the news that the soda-water was undrinkable: "Because of the dirt which lieth at the bottom of the bottle."

"Fetch more from the bazaar, thou owl," I exclaimed irritably.

"I dare not, for all is equally filthy. Therefore, I have a request to make."

"Make it and be quick."

"'Tis this. That from now forward we make our own soda-water. For I have sat at the feet of the men, who are dirty beyond words, that prepare the soda-water in the bazaar, and it is not right that thou should'st drink of such as they make. The matter of making," Uri continued eagerly, "is simple, sahib. All our requirements will be met if thou wilt but purchase a machine and some bottles containing air."

And that in short, was the birth of my soda-water factory.

Before venturing on the undertaking I canvassed the station and secured a contract to supply the white residents and the club with filtered, aerated waters. With that contract, figuratively speaking, in my pocket, I purchased a soda machine, some steel cylinders containing carbonic-acid gas, and a quantity of bottles with marble-like stoppers. Crown-corks would have been preferable but I could not afford the contraption that secures crown-corks to bottles.

A large godown at the back of the bungalow make a convenient factory and warehouse. When the factory and warehouse were furnished with shelves to hold stocks, THE RAJPUR HYGIENIC AERATED WATER FACTORY came into being. When nothing further remained to be done, I ordered Uri to accompany me on a tour of inspection through the works. He passed a critical finger along the whitewashed walls and handled the machinery knowingly.

He then looked up at me with a puzzled frown and said: "Where then, is the filter?"

In the excitement of planning a factory and assembling the machine, I forgot I had undertaken to supply the residents with filtered waters. Something had to be done as my capital was exhausted. In the circumstances I felt justified in constructing a home-made filter by placing three huge earthenware vessels in tiers on a wood stand. It was, I fear, an assumption filter, because there was so much that required to be assumed in and about the ruddy contraption. For instance, I presumed that the charcoal in the upper vessel would annihilate microbes; that the layer of sand in the intermediate vessel would trap such enfeebled microbes as had escaped death by charcoaling; and that bug-less water might perhaps be found in the lowest container.

I am not prepared to swear that my filter caused no qualms. It did. It qualmed me to think that the hardier king of bug might work its way through charcoal and sand and into my customers. However, I put my fears aside when I remembered that all manufacturers take risks and that, with the exception of Colquhoun, there was no one I really cared for in the station.

A day or two before I commenced to make aerated waters, Peeler came to look at my plant and have a yarn. He commenced his yarn with: "Mine's a double."

"Help yourself," I said, nodding my head in the direction of the drinks.

Although he was drinking at my expense he had the impertinence to say: "I don't like the look of that filter."

"Why not?" I asked indignantly.

"Because it looks like a bug-trap."

"Its the best I can do," I replied costively.

"And a bloody bad best it is. Has it not occurred to you that you may get into serious trouble if that bug-trap starts a waterborne epidemic in the station?"

"Never gave it a thought," I lied. "In any case who could trace such a trouble to me?"

" Dr Wazir Ali, of course. He is paid to nose into matters like that."

" I'll have to risk it," I said hopefully.

Peeler snorted indignantly. " You are not the only one who will have to risk it. What about us ? Aren't we supposed to drink the stuff ? "

" Of course," I admitted weakly.

Peeler looked thoughtful and claimed to be inspired when he said : " Why not keep Wazir Ali's mouth shut by offering him a share in the profits ? "

" Because it is not done, you silly ass."

" It happens to be the common practise in England."

" In England ! " I exclained. " How so ? "

" You've heard of those ramps called public undertakings ? "

" You mean gas, light, and drains ? "

" Exactly ! I understand that all public undertakings rely upon Ministers of Health to come to their assistance in time of trouble."

" You chump ! I'm not messing about with public funds and cannot afford to earmark exhorbitant sums for protection."

" I see," he murmured. " In that case I'd advise you to present Wazir Ali with all the mineral water he requires. As a sweetener, I mean. I'm told that public undertakings seldom charge touchy autocrats, such as town clerks, municipal doctors, and inspectors of nuisances, for gas, light, and drains."

" I'll think about it," I said dubiously.

" Do you mind if I have another drink before I leave ? " he asked, helping himself liberally.

" I can't afford to mind."

" What do you mean ? "

" Just this. If anything goes wrong, yours is one of the mouths I may have to shut."

Peeler grinned. He rose, stretched his long body, and said he had work to do. " If," he sighed wearily, " I could find the fool who invented work, I'd dig him up and make him

finish it." As a parting shot he asked me to let him know when I intended to open my factory, as he wished to line the road leading to my bungalow with mounted police.

A cheap jest, begotten of jealousy.

I thought of decorating the road with bits of bunting on opening day. I also intended to invite the white residents to a tea party on the great day. But Peeler's facetious remarks and similar cheap jibes by certain clowns at the club, made me decide not to entertain a ribald crowd on so serious an occasion.

In the circumstances, no opening ceremony the heralded manufacture of my first bottle of aerated water.

It was, perhaps, just as well, because the first bottle burst and the violent explosion scattered the surrounding servants and their veiled wives. Luckily none were injured by flying glass. Uri, delighted by the noise, called to the spectators, who had taken cover, to return and join in the fun. Poor dears. They were led to believe that the explosion was part of the entertainment, and though all returned somewhat diffidently, some clapped handsomely when led by Uri.

I took a bow.

The next bottle came out intact and contained no gas.

A sore disappointment.

However, after protracted trial and terror, with bursting bottles and gasless waters, we perfected our technique and out came a spate of bottles, apparently correctly charged. Some bottles hissed ominously as gas escaped through defective washers, others looked as harmless as delayed action bombs, but it was a good beginning and I felt proud of my plant when I turned in that evening. During the night, explosions disturbed me, but I consoled myself with the thought that all pioneers have set-backs, and how fortunate it was that so many bottles burst when no one was about.

Uri looked grave when he woke me at dawn.

" Sahib," he said anxiously. " Did'st hear our bottles breaking ? "

" Aye," I replied.

" It is in my mind that death lurks in those bottles."

All that remained to be done was to expedite manufacture and put an end to bazaar competition. The latter was as easy as the former was difficult. For when I decided to charge my customers with the bare cost of manufacture, competition ceased on the day we opened.

Like all pioneers, I had my fears and my first shock came from Dr Wazir Ali.

In a chit marked, MOST URGENT, he regretted to inform me that two servants in the Kerridge household had been put out of action by one explosive bottle. They were doing as well as could be expected, but would I be more careful, please.

Valve adjustments followed. Gas pressure lowered.

The next shock was a cheeky note from Peeler, imploring me to take a dekko or Indian peep, at his stock of aerated waters. His waters were still, very still; absolutely gasless, in fact. He also asked me to be more careful, but he demanded more gas and threatened to build a factory of his own if he had any further trouble.

Valve adjustments followed. Gas pressure raised.

Complaint followed complaint, and were dealt with till further valve adjustments became impossible. But when Dr Wazir Ali advised his customers, who referred to themselves as my patients, to open all bottles from behind cover, I might have closed the factory, had not the O'Grady Twins declared that they adored my waters, gassed or ungassed.

Uri was the cause of my success and confusion on the day he clamoured for a draught of lemonade after swallowing a nauseating mixture prescribed by Dr Wazir Ali.

" For what purpose dost thou need lemonade ? " I asked.

" To banish from my mouth the taste of filth as is contained in the medicine the doctor sahib prepares for Indians," replied the ungrateful lad. " Moreover," he continued eagerly, " when lemonade and medicine become married in my stomach, both become exceedingly powerful."

" Why ? " I asked, my curiosity aroused.

" Allah knows, but it is our belief that air-water causes all

medicine to become fierce. A little medicine with air-water contains more strength than much without."

I laughed. He could have had the lemonade without lying. But was it a lie? If not, was it not unwise to ignore a tip which might add to our medical science of by Guess and by God? If, as I reasoned sanely, a drug is fortified by a chaser of aerated water, would not the mixture be more potent if the water harboured the drug? I felt I was on the track of a valuable medical discovery and determined to lace soda-water, lemonade, and ginger-pop, with various drugs and then experiment on my servants.

I thought of sharing my secret with Dr Wazir Ali, but decided not to, as past experience—when I doctored people in the desert—had proved how obdurate medical men are when laymen happen to get a hop ahead of them in curative contemplation. I therefore abandoned the idea of enlightening the doctor and set out to found an aerated pharmacy.

Not an easy task.

Unlike doctors who have access to all drugs and are therefore able to effect cures by applying the drug to the disease, I had to find the complaint which might yield to the drugs I was able to acquire. A very different proposition. I therefore turned my thoughts to the common ailments my servants might contract. Epidemics and graver diseases could be tackled later. But what were the common ailments?

In my dilemma, I turned to my servants for advice and we soon drew up a formidable list of probable complaints. I had to erase bilious disorders, because Uri, who had the run of the pantry and three full meals a day, had the cheek to say: "I ask thee, which among us obtains sufficient food to be overcome by overfeeding?" Acoria also had to be ruled out, because a glance at my medical dictionary warned me that acoria is a condition in which the patient never feels as if he had enough to eat.

All my servants pretended to suffer from that complaint.

Biliousness and acoria seemed to be contagious diseases which were closely related to my servants wages. I therefore

decided to ignore these twin ills till such time as a miserly government increased my salary.

It is true that I secretly longed for some epidemic to test my medical discovery, but I smothered such ambitions and decided to commence with the treatment of colic, cough, and constipation—three troubles the medical profession make so light of. Then, with the aid of a medical dictionary and a little guess-work, my dispensary was soon stocked with carminatives, expectorants, and purgatives, highly charged with gas, and I waited as impatiently as a newly fledged practitioner for a spate of patients.

Dr Wazir Ali, my only competitor, was out of the running because he could not introduce drugs into aerated waters without a factory.

In a very short time and greatly to my dismay, for I only intended to experiment on my servants, demands for aerated relief poured in from the bazaar and outlying villages. My patients' requests for syrupy curatives held in suspension in scented waters, kept me busy and left me little time to attend to my legitimate duties or to join my fellow members at the club.

That blissful period soon passed, for when Colquhoun complained that he seldom saw or heard from me, I felt it would be wiser to return to work and allow my servants to carry on at the pharmacy.

All would have been well and I might have been known as Vishnu Schweppes Sahib, the Ginger-Pop-God-of-Medicines, had Uri not taken advantage of my absence to trade on his own.

That happened a little later.

Like others, who are in advance of their time, I too suffered from criticism and ridicule. For when Dr Wazir Ali and his assistants in conjecture, heard of the immediate alleviation of many painful conditions, they were smitten with jealousy and slandered me because I, too, tried to relieve suffering in return for filthy lucre.

There was one professional malpractice I refused to subscribe to. I refused to advertise. Not even in the subtle

manner the medical profession practise and get away with.

For instance.

Nothing could persuade me to paste, AMATEUR DOCTOR, in bold letters on the windscreen of my car. And I scorned to carry a black patent-leather bag containing medicated waters to the club, hoping that some member might feel ill and need my attention. I also considered it was beneath my dignity to dangle a bottle opener about my person or to allow one to peep slyly from an inner pocket, as doctors employ stethoscopes. And as for trying to persuade a dissatisfied customer to try some other brand of medicated water if they felt doubtful about mine—impossible! Nor did I require a second-opinion to help me to extract additional sums from the unwary. Above all, I refused to attract customers or advertise my whereabouts by hanging a red lamp without my bungalow. A red lamp might have been wrongly interpreted by the licentious.

Like the medical profession I too had to face risks.

Such risks must not be confused with the kind of risks that patients take with doctors. But certain risks, misnamed opportunities, by envious laymen, or vocational temptations, by dispassionate physicians, came my way.

The night was hot. I had just managed to get to sleep, after repeatedly watering the matting on my bed with a watering can, when a voice whispered: "Sahib."

The voice was the voice of a woman.

"What now?" I murmured, feeling vexed at being waked.

She stood in the shadow and I wondered who she could be, how she was shaped and what she wanted.

"A hen does not announce the break of day and a woman does not enter a man's bedroom to steal," is an Indian saying. I therefore had no reason to feel anxious about my possessions, so I sat up and tried to see the girl.

As I peered about, she whispered: "Have I thy permission to speak?"

"Speak," I replied gently.

She then faltered: " I—I—am—filled with fear, because I—am—am—alone."

Her first night attack on man, made her nervous, I thought.

" None fear me," I sighed.

Encouraged by my modesty, she continued confidingly: " The father of my child is unaware of my presence here."

I suppose I should have ordered Satan to take two steps to the rear and get behind me, but refrained from doing so for fear of hurting the girl's feelings.

She then said: " My man has no thought for me."

" Such men deserve but little consideration," I answered firmly.

We thought alike, it seemed.

Then came a sigh, the jungle of bangles, and almost inaudibly: " It fills me with shame to come to thee by stealth at night," and hurriedly, " overcoming my fear, because the father of our child is unconscious with drink, I came to—to—to—beseech thee for a bottle of magic water to ease the pain in the belly of our child."

She collected a bottle of my celebrated carminative water and a reproachful look for disturbing me at night.

I then returned to bed and elapsed into virtue, but I longed for a word with the gentleman who bleated: " Who can find a virtuous woman ? "

My gas-swept patients became a living advertisement till the morning Peeler rode to my bungalow and disturbed me while I was totalizing my loss and loss accounts. What with broken bottles, returned stocks and pilfering, it seemed that I had to close the factory or raise prices and be known as a profiteer.

" I've come to ask you to help me in putting two and two together," he said as he took a nearby chair.

" Two + two doubles = four good drinks, so help yourself," I replied, pointing at a full decanter.

" The two and two I was referring to," he said after draining the glass, " is, curiously enough, also connected with drink. Wazir Ali suspects, and I agree with him, that all is

not well with, ahem! THE RAJPUR HYGIENIC AERATED WATER FACTORY."

"I need not tell you what I think of all policeman, but Wazir Ali is a jealous old fool," I retorted hotly.

"Maybe. But as you seem determined to be unhelpful, I intend to question the jealous old fool. So long, then," and Peeler departed.

Soon after he left, the filter was dismantled and cleaned thoroughly. A precautionary measure.

On his return, Peeler demanded a pick-me-up before commencing an offensive investigation into my affairs.

Claiming to be my friend, he cooed belligerently: "What in hell have you been putting into your so-called medicinal waters?"

I asked him to search me.

He promised to do so, if necessary, and repeated his question.

"My medicinal waters contain carminatives, expectorants, and purgatives." I replied loftily.

"Anything else?"

"No!"

Peeler looked puzzled. "The police have been informed that certain ladies in the bazaar, who observe purdah, and are therefore unable to obtain spirituous liquor, are suffering from alcoholism. Even children," Peeler continued gravely, "are being affected. I have had the local grog shops watched and am satisfied that liquor is not being surreptitiously conveyed from such places. Moreover, Wazir Ali was called in to treat a case of hysteria and found his patient, a very respectable woman, fighting drunk. He believes that your factory is the source of supply and that your so-called medicinal waters are being laced with alcohol."

"Impossible!" I declared hotly.

"Who is in charge of the factory?"

"Uri."

"Ah!" and Peeler stroked his cheek thoughtfully. "Have you, by chance, noticed the lad's sudden prosperity?

His gold embroidered turban and silver trinkets ? "

" I'm not paid to be observant," I replied, in defence of Uri, but my heart sank.

" May I question Uri ? "

" Of course."

Poor lad. He broke down and confessed that a couple of scoundrels bribed him to adulterate mineral waters, intended for the bazaar, with vast quantities of native liquor.

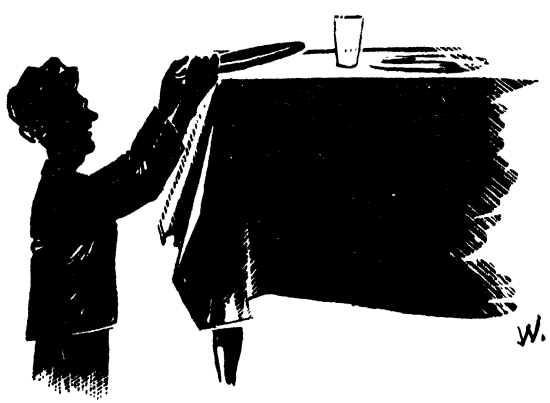
Peeler dealt with the scoundrels and Uri was carried to the police station by a bearded constable. I turned aside to hide a smile and pretended not to hear him howl : " Protect me, sahib ! Protect me ! Remove the bearded one from beneath me, for who shall serve thee if I am taken."

Uri was allowed to escape from the police station and, for fear of being recaptured, he took to the neighbouring jungle and only crept home after dark. But many months passed before he dared to face a policeman.

I sold out to the club and was free to take a leading part in the usual grouse about the club soda.

But I often wondered how it would have been had I grown a girl servant in place of the child—Uri.

A girl came between Uri and myself. She was a slip of a girl who accompanied Uri when he came to say farewell before he joined the club Babu as foreman in charge of the club aerated water machinery. She was his bethrothed, aged five.



CHAPTER XIV

A Bengali; I Dine Out; Vegetarians; Permissible Lies; A Babu and Love; Who was Honor Moore? Necessity is the Mother of Intentions; A Tyrannical Government; British Customs; Who can find a Virtuous Woman?

THE club babu, a Bengali, was inclined to be resentful when my aerated water factory was placed in his charge, but he forgave me in the course of time and invited me to dine with him.

" Sir," he whispered in babu-English, " will your honour demean yourself and take food in my household ? "

" Of course, Babu, and may I suggest that only Indian dishes are served ? "

" Thank you, sir, you are indeed mindful of Indians," he replied and hurried from the bar.

All Bengalis are not clerks, but the majority of clerks come from Bengal, where they learn to misquote Shakespeare and aspire to become Bachelors of Art. Those who fail to qualify are known as F.B.A. or Failed Bachelors of Art and they then possess a market and marriageable value and an astounding vocabulary of English. But few babus have a sense of humour and the babu who was said to have exclaimed : " My God ! How annoying," when his wife eloped with a babu of her choice, was anything but lukewarm at the time.

Such was the club Babu, a portly, kindly fellow who enriched the English language by inventing new words and who preferred the long to the short word.

An excellent dinner, prepared by his womenfolk who remained out of sight, was wasted at first because of nervousness all round. My host was diffident, his hired servants were scared, and I, the sole guest, felt affected by the feeling of general apprehension till the fourth round of drinks, when we all became as brothers.

All Hindus are not vegetarians and my host claimed to be a " carnivorous Hindu " and liked it, but he had to be careful of " many who pry " for fear of being outcasted by the orthodox.

" How do you guard against those who pry ? " I asked.

" By the alteration of the nomenclature of much that we like to eat or drink, sir."

" For instance ? "

" In this manner, sir. I and my friends are greatly addicted to meat of all kinds. In order, therefore, to confuse those who pry on us, meat is misnamed as black vegetable, chicken becomes white vegetable, fish is known as turnip, and shrimps go by the names of water flowers."

" But Babu, you cannot hope to mislead those who pry. Not for long, or by lying, I mean."

" What to do when quandaried ? " he asked and added hastily, " and don't forget that the lies we tell about food, all come within the category of permissible lies."

" What do you mean ? "

" Five permissible lies are allowed in our religion, sir."

" They are ? "

" To save life, to keep faith, to raise laughter, to defraud an enemy, and to punish evil doers."

" And which applies to the lie about food ? "

" To defraud an enemy, sir."

" I see," I murmured thoughtfully.

" Have you no permissible lies in your religion ? " he then asked.

" I have one private lie, permissible or not," I replied.

" Please expel it, sir."

From Kipling's *Certain Maxims of Hafiz* I quoted :

If there be trouble to Herward
And a lie of the blackest can clear,
Lie, while thy lips can move
Or a man is alive to hear.

" I fear that we are not so seductive of womens, sir. Are you enamoured of poets ? " he asked eagerly.

" I like certain kinds of poetry, Babu."

" I, too, am a poet," he whispered and a khaki blush suffused his kindly face. " I sing about love, " he said shyly.

" May I hear one of your love-poems ? "

" Yes, sir. I often sing this when melancholious."

Come ! my Darling,
Come !
I love you since last
Autumn.
I love you from Heart's
Bottomme.
Come !

" Excellent ! Babu, and very touching."

" Thank you, sir. We are a poetical race and we often recite English poetry to one another, but some of your poetry is difficult to comprehend."

" I am of the opinion that many modern poets do not comprehend the stuff they write."

" Who was Honor Moore ? " he asked suddenly.

" I don't know. When did you hear of her ? "

" I first heard of Honor Moore when a friend recited a poem and I wondered if she was some noble English character."

" Can you remember the poem or part of it ? "

" Only these few lines, sir : ' I could not love thee, dear, so much, loved I not honour more.' "

" Babu," I said, changing the subject hurriedly, " you are well educated, why therefore, did you elect to become a clerk instead of, say, a lawyer ? "

" Necessity is the mother of intentions, sir."

" Too true ! And an excellent defence when charged with attempted rape, but how did the mother of intentions affect your career ?"

" It was like this, your honour. When I became adolescent, a little after puberty, my maternal grandmother decided that I should become a doctor. I therefore became a medical student. At that mixing and mixing (pill making) I was pucca, but when it come to cutting and hacking at corpses, I run, I run and jump under my grandmother's bed and for three days I eat nothing."

I wanted to hear what this gentle man had to say about India for the Indians, so asked : " What do you think of Gandhi ? "

" Gandhi is a holy advocate who will help us to regain India some day."

" Do you think that that will benefit India ? "

" It will be greatly beneficial to Indians, sir."

" Why ? "

" Because all the best occupations are usurped by the English."

" Do you dislike us, then ? "

" I love you ! " he exclaimed vehemently.

" From heart's bottomme ? "

" Indubitably ! But I do not love all the English."

" Tell me, please."

" The English have little patience and are irascible, besides— "

" Besides what ? "

" I do not care to utter for fear of conveying hurts to your feelings."

" Please forget my feelings."

" Forgive me, then, when I say that although I am not seditious minded, I am opinionated that the British Government is neum sanguineum bonum." He paused to impress me and then said : " That is Latin for no bloody good, sir."

I hid a smile and asked : " Why do you think the British Government is no ruddy good ? "

" Because of their tyrannicalness towards Indians. We are agreed that ' The ancient rule, the simple plan, that they should take that have the power, and they should keep who can,' is emblematical of the British Government."

" Babu ! " I said sternly, " you are talking like a seditious Raja."

" Pardon, sir, we are aware of the misdemeanants in your Government."

" Turning now to ourselves, Babu, what else do you dislike about the English in India ? "

" We er—er—er do not like many of your customs, sir."

" Yes ? "

" Again I fear to convey hurts to your honour."

" You mean that you hesitate to draw comparisons between our customs and yours ? "

" Comparisons are oderous, sir."

Although he reminded me that comparisons were oderous, he stated that in his opinion English women compared unfavourably with their Indian sisters and that their behaviour " dumbfounded " him. When asked to explain, he said it horrified him to know that our women were allowed to dance with " stranger " men and as for kala juggas, those secluded huggeries, where couples cuddle during dance intervals, such places, he thought, put a premium on immorality. He looked upon dancing as inflamed capering and kala juggas as brazenly convenient retreats ; that short skirts and scanty bathing costumes were indecent, and he wondered why engaged couples were allowed out of sight.

I itched to smack the little man and to defend our customs by attacking theirs, but it would have been easier to overturn a billiard ball than to alter his unconsidered opinion.

However, I had some satisfaction in making him confess, unconsciously, that Indian women were not all that he claimed them to be. For, once again, voicing that disillusioned old Biblical misogynist I asked : " Who can find a virtuous woman ? "

" Ah ! That is indeed the rubber," he said ruefully.

CHAPTER XV

Sundays; Beggars at the Gate; An Offensive Youth; A Matter of Ears; Boycotted; A Lost Main Drain; Reluctant Officials; What to do when Quandaried? Certain Aspects of Hygiene; A Cobbler's Remorse; My Main Drain Returns.

FOR some unknown reason, Sunday is regarded as a gift-day by beggars, Indian servants and their children. If, however, we commenced the day with an early act of charity, it should be remembered that Sundays were not allowed to interfere with our weekday activities.

It was my custom to stroll to the gate in my pyjamas on Sunday morning to drop coins into palms knarled with rheumatism or mottled with leprosy and acknowledge the blessings of whining beggars as they shuffled away.

After an early cup of tea, the shrill voices of children dressed in their brightest garments and loaded with cheap jewellery, reminded me that it was time to distribute glutinous sweets wrapped in fresh leaves. The parents' grateful thanks and the grave salaams from the tiny tots were my reward. Such was my way of observing Sundays and, if my soul remained in jeopardy, I had the satisfaction of being blessed by beggars and thanked by children. And yet, when I think back, I am reminded that the full extent of my munificence amounted to less than three shillings—about the sum placed in the offertory box by the pious.

One Sunday morning, after distributing largess, I was on my way to the Club with a grin on my face, a song on my lips, and fully determined to " speak evil of no man, to be no brawler, but gentle, showing meekness to all men," including babus, when an arrogant Indian youth pushed me aside, adopted a belligerent stance, and spat contemptuously at my feet. Young India, I thought.

Remembering my resolution to be no brawler and still smiling, though shorn of song, I politely exclaimed : " You unmannerly young skunk ! "

"Gandhi-ki-jai (Victory to Gandhi) shouted the bold youth.

" This, Babu, is a matter between thee and me. As for Mr Gandhi, of whom I am thoroughly sickened, he is not concerned, so apologize, or— "

" I am filled with hatings for the English ! " he screamed hysterically.

" That is understandable, perhaps, but are you also filled with gin ? " I am sympathetic towards kindred spirits.

We might have parted friends, if he had not uttered an unnecessarily offensive remark about the English women in the station. Had he expressed his opinion about some of the men, I might have agreed, but he went too far, so I seized his ears and rocked him gently to and fro.

" Gandhi-ki-jai ! " he shouted during the preliminary rocking.

" Apologize ! " I yelled and rocked him again.

" My ears ! My ears ! he wailed.

" They are getting longer ! " I warned him.

The rocking continued till I feared I might have his ears on my hands.

We parted half friends and half enemies—I was friendly, and therefore forgot about our quarrel.

On the following morning, while I was breakfasting on the verandah, the local cobbler, a low caste fellow, approached me without removing his shoes.

" Get out, thou bhanchute ! " I roared.

" Huzoor," he replied, employing a term of respect, only because he was on enemy territory, " a fellow citizen was assaulted by thee last evening."

" Are we in Russia, then, O spoiler of leather ? " I asked facetiously.

He smiled familiarly. " All men in India are now equal. I came to inform thee that thou art fined five rupees for assault."

" By whose orders am I fined ? "

" My orders," he smirked.

" Thine ? "

" Aye. For Mahatma Gandhi," I groaned, " has ordered non-co-operation and thy courts are without power. Wherefore have the people in the bazaar chosen me to be their judge."

" Chosen thee ? thou low caste dabbler in skins ! " I exclaimed and grinned.

" Even so. And smile not, for this is no matter for mirth. Since I have fined thee, thou wilt assuredly pay."

He departed hurriedly and before I could reach his ears.

The story of the Cobbler Judge met with much amusement at the Club that evening. O'Grady, the magistrate, laughed heartily when told that he had been superseded by a low caste Indian. Kerridge sneered, and Peeler declared that he prepared, if necessary, to arrest me for contempt of Cobbler.

But the next morning my bearer looked grave and informed me that my sweeper, an enthusiast at his job, had been ordered to leave my service, unless I complied with the orders

of the bazaar court. If I refused to obey, all my servants would be forced to leave me.

" What is the meaning of this ? " I asked.

" If we continue to serve thee, after being warned to leave thy service, none among us will dare to enter the bazaar for fear of being beaten. Moreover, even if we escaped beating by means of fair words, none in the bazaar will dare to sell to us food or vegetables."

I was faced with being servantless and boycotted by the bazaar merchants.

I thought of staying with Colquhoun till the trouble was forgotten, but was told that he too would be boycotted if he sheltered me.

" What shall I do ? " I asked my bearer.

" Stop the mouth of the Cobbler," he suggested.

" How ? "

" Pay the fine, Sahib."

" I'm damned if I will ! " I exclaimed.

I realized my predicament when my sweeper prepared to leave. The sweeper replaces the sewerage system in civilized lands. If, therefore, my main drain was forcibly discharged, I might find myself on the stool of repentance at any moment.

It seemed that Mahmata Gandhi's power was directed against me.

In the circumstances only three courses remained open. To pay the fine ; to apply for a transfer ; to ask for Government protection.

I first turned to Peeler for help.

" What can I do ? " he asked, weakly, I thought.

" Get one of your constables to beat up the Cobbler, of course."

Peeler looked at me through narrowed eyelids. " I could do so," he drawled, " *and* lose my pension. No, my lad ! your best plan is to cut along and see O'Grady. He, after all, is the Magistrate.

To O'Grady I went.

" O'Grady," I said, interrupting him in court, " may I have a word with you ? "

He descended from the seat of justice and waved me into his private room.

" You ! " I exclaimed indignantly, " laughed when told that you had been ousted by the local Cobbler."

" Is that why you interrupted me ? " he asked icily.

" Partly, but there is more to follow."

" Hurry up, then, I'm busy."

He listened patiently and said : " I advise you to take no notice of the Cobbler."

" Can you deal with him ? "

" No ! But I think you should ignore the man."

" And lose my servants ? "

" Hum ! Have you been to Kerridge ? "

" I have not ! And if you think you can palm me on to Kerridge as Peeler palmed me on to you—you—you are a silly ass."

Had O'Grady not been a sympathetic fellow I might have been fined for contempt of court.

O'Grady laughed. " Kerridge," he said, " is the head of the district and might use his influence—indirectly, I mean."

Kerridge advised me to leave Rajpur and tour the States until the trouble was forgotten, but when I told him that my servants would not dare to accompany me for fear of reprisals against their families, who would have to remain at Rajpur, he suggested that I might wait till my servants were assaulted and then charge the Cobbler with enticement.

It was stupid of him to think that my servants would wait to be beaten up in the bazaar. Stupid, but typical of Kerridge.

My proposal to pay the fine and acknowledge the Cobbler's power, was met with hoots of indignation at the Club that evening, and I had to face such remarks as : " I call that lowering the flag." " What will the bazaar think ? " " Ignore the swine ! " " For God's sake, man, don't let us down ! "

But no one offered to house me for fear of losing *their* servants.

" What to do when quandaried ? " I thought as I walked back to my bungalow.

Curiously enough I felt no resentment against my fellow residents, for had I not, in somewhat similar circumstances, urged others to face the kind of trouble I'd have bolted from ? Moreover, is the burden not light on another man's shoulder ? But, had Gandhi called off all servants in India, I wonder what might have become of us ? Would the Indian Army have been ordered to undertake menial duties. If so, who would have dared to ask sowar, sapper, or sepoy to take the place of the humble sweeper ?

I went to bed with the comforting thought that darkness lies at the torch's foot and that all would be well by the morrow. But when my bearer waked me at dawn and told me that the Cobbler had summarily dismissed my sweeper, the " joy that cometh in the morning " turned to a deep depression that centred over my navel.

My main drain was gone.

I trembled to think how certain aspects of hygiene, born of regular habits, could be performed. I could, of course, have entered the jungle on my hygienic occasions, but the distant jungle was usually peopled with women collecting firewood and young girls in charge of cattle and I am inclined to be secretive on such occasions.

The Cobbler's dastardly trick acted like an emotional astringent and I felt tempted to defy him and carry on without servants, till I remembered that no one in the bazaar would dare to supply me with food of any kind.

It was with a sense of foreboding that I dressed, ate a poor breakfast, and walked to my office.

" Sir," said my Brahmin head clerk as he stepped into my office and watched with disapproval my efforts to kill a bothering fly, " your honour is augmented with difficulty."

" I am, Babu, and I propose to circumvent the difficulty."

" By liquidating the fine, sir ? "

" So you have heard I've been fined ? "

" Everyone has, sir."

" Then, Babu, perhaps you can tell me why a low class man has the power to punish me."

" It is a rapscallion dodge, sir, and one participating with the process of non-co-operation, which is detrimental to British interests."

" But why has a low caste swine been placed in power ? "

He contributed to my description of the Cobbler by spitting a mouthful of liquid contempt on the floor and said : " To be punished by a low caste individual helps to decrease the dignity of the white man. But that," he added thoughtfully, " is only the commencemtnt of non-co-operation. For, due to the clamourings of the multitudinous masses, all power will soon be taken from the British, who will then be forced to leave India to the Indians."

" But, Babu ! Can't you see that as soon as the British leave, the Indians will be at each other's throats ? "

" Not with greater savagery than Europeans when at war, sir."

" Shall we change the subject, Babu ? "

" Yes, sir. You must not pay the fine."

" What do you advise me to do ? "

" I can adjust the difficulty."

" How ? "

" I am Brahmin," he said proudly. " The low caste Cobbler will therefore have to obey Brahminical instructions. To-day I will send for the man and, keeping him at the prescribed distance, so as to prevent him from contaminating my presence, I will order him to cease from persecuting you."

" How much will that cost me, Babu ? " I asked suspiciously.

I did not want to hurt his feelings, but I knew only too well that the efficacy of priestly intervention is governed by the victim's ability to pay.

" Nothing, your honour."

" Why not ? "

" Because you are always gracious towards Indians."

I bowed my head with shame.

After thanking him I asked if he could overcome my sweeper's fears and persuade him to return to my service."

" Indubitably ! Your sweeper will be returned to you within a few days, sir."

He looked suprised when I dismally exclaimed :

" Gosh ! "

But, unlike us, Indians are unmoved by certain aspects of hygiene. They are, I shall say—more adaptable ? Therefore, any open space, with or without cover, is shamelessly peopled by evacuees at sunrise.

It looked like the jungle for me till the return of my sweeper.

Although Brahmins are omnipotent in a land fermenting with religious fervour, his sudden rise to power had turned the Cobbler's head. He obstinately refused to cancel the fine and thereby defied my Brahmin clerk in particular and the priestly caste of Brahmins in general.

A foolish act by a wilful fellow.

So I had to ghoom, or bum about the jungle, till the matter was settled.

In the meanwhile the Brahmins got together and outcasted the Cobbler, who became a social pariah.

After about three days of desultory ghooming, my bearer came to me one morning and said : " The Cobbler awaits thy pleasure."

" For what purpose ? "

" He seeks thy forgiveness, sahib."

" Send him to me, then."

Although I was filled with indignation I could not help feeling sorry for the pitiful fellow who removed his turban and flung himself at my feet.

" Sahib ! Sahib ! be merciful," he wailed. " Use thy power to save me. For I am outcasted, my friends scorn me, and the mother of my children threatens to depart. More-

over, none will now offer me work and hunger has entered into my household. Protect me! Protect me! O sahib."

The abject fellow was in my power and I felt tempted to add to his misery. But another's troubles never brought me comfort in mine and my bowels fretted with compassion for the trembling, whining wretch who was once so arrogant.

" Arise, brother, and tell me what can be done to lift the ban," I said gently.

He rose, wiped his eyes with the back of his hand, and snivelled: " Because I defied the Brahmins, I may not eat, drink, or mix with my caste fellows. The ban cannot be lifted ere I provide sufficient money to feed many of our priests."

" How much money is demanded by the priests, brother ? "

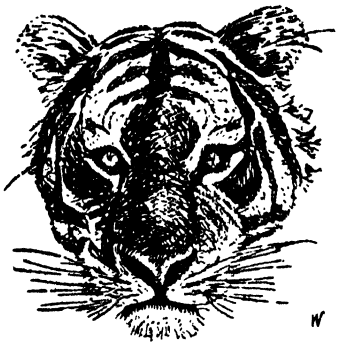
" One hundred rupees, sahib."

One hundred rupees (£7) is a lot of money to a man who earns about one pound per month.

" Depart and I will speak on thy behalf to my head Babu who, like thy priests, is also a Brahmin," I said and away he went, leaving his cares with me.

It was stupid of me, I suppose. I did not speak to my Brahmin clerk, the priests feasted at my expense, I gained a great deal of credit in the bazaar, and very nearly earned the affections of the Cobbler's daughter.

A few days later someone placed a brand-new hundred rupee note on my office desk.



CHAPTER XVI

Cow-dust Time ; Carts in Confusion ; A Terrible Death ; I Fear the Killer ; Was it the Whisky ? A Mocking Jungle ; Two Tiger ; Broken Dreams ; Back from the Dead ; An Unwanted Man ; Back to the Dead.

ONE evening at cow-dust time, the hour when the tracks leading to villages are clearly indicated by columns of fine dust raised by cattle returning to their byres, I was motoring along a jungly road leading to one of the States.

For some unknown reason I felt nervous. The jungles were still and not a leaf or blade of grass stirred during that sultry ride. The air was oppressive and my thoughts turned to tiger as I looked nervously about. Visions of lurking tiger made me anxious to get clear of the jungle and into the open.

On rounding a bend my car nearly collided with a cart and when I pulled up and looked ahead I saw a convoy of carts in considerable confusion. Some bullocks had broken loose and others with dilated nostrils from which nervous saliva was pouring, snorted with terror as they fought and struggled to get clear of their yokes. Many carts were slewed across the road. Some facing the direction from which they had come. Several bent axles and splintered spokes told of violent collisions during a period of panic. I descended from the car

to make enquiries of a body of men who were huddled together in the centre of the broken convoy and in my excitement forgot one of the four precautions that should be observed in certain circumstances in India.

The man is wise, it is said, who takes care to keep 70 cubits distance from an elephant, 60 from a drunken man, 30 from a woman, and 15 from a horned beast. As it turned out it was the last of these precautions that affected me as I commenced to pick my way from the car. In my endeavours to keep clear of the jungle on the side in which I suspected a tiger was lurking, I was forced perilously near a couple of bullocks yoked to a cart. Their scything horns narrowly missed my stomach, but a few backward leaps to avoid their menacing horns, brought me uncomfortably close to jungle and tiger. The safety zone among horned beasts is clearly defined, but neither the Koran nor the Vedas give any indication of the safe distance to be observed between man and man-eater. It is an interval, I suppose, that can only be judged by experience. My path therefore lay somewhere between the Scylla of horned beasts and the Charybdis of tiger claws.

I reached the men and wiped the sweat from my brow.

" Speak of what has happened," I commanded.

All tried to speak at once and I was compelled to silence them with a peremptory : " Shut up ! "

Then I picked on an intelligent looking fellow and repeated my question.

" Sahib," said the shaken man, glancing nervously towards the jungle, " a terrible thing has happened. One of us is no more."

" Fool, speak clearly."

" The man is no more because a tiger has killed him."

" Speak on."

" This is how it happened, sahib. The tiger at first remained hidden, but he crept within a stone's throw of our carts for a distance of about one mile."

" How knew ye ? "

" Because he spoke now and then and it was with difficulty that we restrained our bullocks from breaking loose."

I nodded.

" We, knowing that the jungles are filled with such beasts who threaten but do not always attack, continued on our way till we came near to yonder rock." He pointed to a mass of boulders opposite an upturned cart.

" Was it there where the tiger lay ? "

" In truth, it was. Judge of our terror when we heard a roar and a moment later saw him rush forth and spring on the foremost cart. After but a short while, for the cartman threw himself between his bullocks, the tiger seized the man and— "

" Where was he seized ? " I interrupted eagerly.

How and where a tiger seizes a man has always been disputed. I therefore wanted to hear from one who had seen it done.

" He was taken by the shoulder, sahib. But the man struggled bravely as he was being carried away and clutched at grass and shrubs to save himself. Angered by the man's struggling, the tiger freed him for a moment and then held him by the buttocks. With his body bent at the waist and his head and feet dangling along the grass, he was taken but a short way into the jungle."

" How know ye ? "

" We heard him crying for help."

" God ! " I exclaimed.

" The full tale is not yet told, sahib, for the man continued to cry. Then came a cry even as a woman cries."

" A shriek ? "

" Aye. It was then that our livers turned into water, for the shriek that reached our ears was as from one whose chest was being crushed by a great weight and we knew that our man was dead."

" Ye think, then, that the killing was performed by a great biting at the chest ? "

" Verily ! Sahib," he continued, folding his hands as if in

prayer, " may Vishnu the Preserver, save us from Siva the Destroyer, for but a short while after we knew that our man was dead we heard the crunching of bones."

I may be as brave as the next man but three, but I was in no mood to grope about in tall grass searching for a fearless man-eater. I therefore asked the men to bunch together and beat the brute along a probable line of retreat and towards me, but no one budged for fear of the dead man's spirit.

There was another reason why I refused to locate that tiger. I knew a subaltern who came to grips with a tiger in similar circumstances. The tiger won. And because the subaltern was my friend I was detailed to collect his remains in a gunny bag.

Anyhow, the cartman was dead, perhaps. Yet it was foreign to me to allow a tiger to get away with murder, because I am inclined to be arrogant and have my own way, but I was not prepared to face the brute and became the most unassuming man among a crowd of self-effacing cartmen.

I could not get to sleep that night.

The heated air within my mosquito net, the bright moonlight flooding my face, and the distant : " Augh ! Augh ! " of some tiger which had failed to kill, kept me awake as I lay on a camp-cot in the garden of the State guest-house.

I pictured the cartman lying on his back, mauled and terrified, with the tiger stretched beside him. His piteous cries for help silenced by curling lip and unsheathing claw, his slightest movement arrested by a snarl. I wondered how tiger kills man. Is life ended by a sudden blow ? No ! Not by the cat tribe. Does a tiger commence to eat before his victim becomes unconscious ? Ugh !

Then came another disturbing thought. Were the men right in assuming that the last shriek they heard was the victim's death cry ? God ! He might be alive and we had left him.

After that thought, sleep was impossible. I got out of bed and helped myself to a stiff whisky from the bedside table and sat in a chair.

It was the whisky that did it.

Something had to be done. The scene of the tragedy was ten miles distant. The night was moonlit and a shotgun loaded with buckshot, if fired at close range ought to kill the tiger without great risk. The garden and surrounds seemed strangely deserted and even the armed guard, whose duty it was to protect me, were absent. Slipping hastily into my clothes, I picked up my gun which was always placed near my bed, and after shoving a couple of cartridges into the breech, and half a dozen in my pocket, I made my way to my car.

It seemed like a bad dream.

Five minutes of cranking and a few terrific back-fires should have brought my servants hurrying to me, but no sound came from their quarters. Rather than have a lot of men trying to persuade me not to go, I tinkered and cranked alone. The engine started at last and the car began to bucket along the track in the direction from which I had come earlier in the day.

I had no difficulty in recognizing the area where the tragedy occurred. Cairns of bullock droppings and wheel ruts clearly marked the place in the moonlight. I climbed out of the car and stood and listened with ear inclined toward the jungle.

How I longed to hear some sound. Even a low grunt from the tiger or a cry from his victim. But the only sound I heard was a persistent thudding that seemed to come from all directions. Twice I raise the gun to cover the direction the sound seemed to come from, and then with a shame-faced grin I located the source.

It was the beating of my heart.

I went forward slowly and stood at the edge of the jungle. I felt like a bather poised over ice cold water, trying to make up my mind to take the plunge. And like a bather, I went straight in, before fear turned me back. Then, parting the tall grass with my left hand, I balanced my gun in a sweating palm and advanced on tiptoe. Nullahs had to be crossed and in scrambling up the steep sides avalanches of pebbles warned

the wakeful jungle of a clumsy man's approach. A slight rustle made me leap to the shelter of a tree, where I stood panting fearfully with gun raised. The belling of a nervous sambur, followed by the dismal howling from a pack of jackal and the errie " pheow " of a nearby fox, raised goose-flesh on my skin and the gun to my shoulder.

The jungle seemed to mock me.

Tiger dissolved into bushes, a grubbing bear became a dark boulder, a leap of panther turned out to be a hare in a hurry, an inquisitive bat made me long for home, and I nearly shot a mighty spider whose web held across my eyes.

A few more frightening yards and I'd be somewhere near where I was told the man cried for help. Stumbling forward through bush, thorn, and tangled bamboo, I came on a dark patch on the ground. I bent down to gaze at the bloodstains and as I did so a twig broke with a sharp snap behind me. Whirling to face the direction the sound came from, I heard the muffled thud of a soft-footed animal landing from a height and in the opposite direction.

God ! There were two tiger about.

It all happened in a fraction of a second. As I turned to face the direction of the second sound, I was struggling beneath a striped, stinking beast.

" Sahib. Sahib," a man whispered. " Awake and return. It is unwise to remain with the dead, even in sleep."

I opened my eyes and saw my servant looking anxiously at me as I lay sprawled in a chair at dawn.

It *was* the whisky.

" How came ye to know I was with the dead ? " I asked.

" Because of the happenings of yesterday and by the movements of thy limbs during sleep, sahib."

" Ma'Uzbillah ! " (May God protect us) I exclaimed.

But had I known that the tiger that killed the cartman was the notorious she-devil, man-eating, Sala, I'd have not dared to even dream about her, the bitch.

It was not long before Sala killed again.

A few days after the death of the cartman I was about to

set off on my lawful occasions, an uninteresting job of work, when I came across Varnia, who was hurrying on his way to some jungle bust or bosom. Thereupon I decided to bum about the jungle rather than look for work, so I beckoned and Varnia joined me.

" It has come to my ears that a man was taken from his field by a tiger last night," he said casually.

" Where ? " I asked.

" Some three miles from where we stand, sahib."

" Come, then," I said and we set off on a so-called road that passed through a tiger infested area. The trees had been felled and scrub jungle cleared for a distance of about a hundred yards on both sides of the road. An approaching tiger had therefore to venture into the open before he could attack cartmen or wayfarers. Unfortunately, lack of cover seldom prevented a determined man-eater—and there were far too many of these terrible pests in this particular area—from dining off man or woman, but a clear view on either side inspired confidence and checked all but the most determined of these malodorous cats.

On reaching a village set in a park-like area of tamarind tress, Varnia pointed at a mob of excited men and women in a nearby field and said : " It is in my mind that the tiger killed in that field, sahib."

Varnia was right.

We were soon surrounded by the excited mob who clamoured to tell us what had happened. I waited till the excitement died down and then learnt that a man had been taken while he was guarding his crops during the night. A neighbour in an adjacent field heard shouts of " Tiger ! Tiger ! " and no more.

Varnia was set to work and soon transcribed the tragedy from sand, grass, and leaf. Judging by a torn and blood-stained loin-cloth, a tooth-marked staff, and a patch of trampled wheat, it seemed clear that the unfortunate man had tried to put up a brave fight before he was carried off. The tiger tracks led to a cavernous ravine into which I thought it

imprudent to enter. The man was dead, without doubt, so there was no need to be rash.

On our return to the village, Varnia and I collected a number of men who combed the ravine and surrounding jungle under Varnia's direction, while I stood behind a tree at the far end of the beat. But, like so many hasty beats, we drew a blank.

A couple of days later, Varnia and I returned on our tracks and again the villagers were in a state of excitement and again I asked why.

" The man who was taken by a tiger, has returned," said the village headman simply.

" Gosh ! Anything can happen in this ruddy land," I murmured to myself.

It is well to remember, I thought, that men, more often women, are taken by tiger in the shape of a poison cup. Both disappear and never return.

" That man is dead," I said firmly.

" Nay, sahib, he lives and he is being watched by day and night as he sits in his hut."

" Because he is now possessed by the spirit of the tiger, I suppose ? " I said peevishly. I was becoming a little tired of these possessions.

" Nothing is hidden from thee," replied the headman and Varnia agreed noisily.

" Tell us what happened," commanded Varnia.

The headman called to a woman, who said she was collecting tamarinds on the day after we beat for the tiger and saw a naked man perched on a tamarind tree.

The headman took up the tale. " 'Tis true," he said, " for when many of us were assembled beneath the tree and saw it was he who was taken, we helped him to the ground and found he was bereft of sense."

" Bring him to me," I said.

The severely mauled man sat beside me and poured sand through his fingers. When I questioned him he shouted : " Tiger ! Tiger ! " and had to be held. He required a

handkerchief and was careless about his person. His bloodshot eyes lacked understanding and reflected the light in an uncanny manner.

I could do nothing to help, so I left a few rupees for the madman and rode away. But I dreaded to think of what might happen to " he who returned from the dead."

The Bhils have a reprehensible method of dealing with the aged, the possessed, and the unwanted. Such undesirables are bound, wrapped in a blanket, and placed beneath a bush in the jungle. Then a hunting party, who have been warned of of the presence of a dangerous animal, search the jungle and, being deceived by shadow and blanket, account for the dangerous animal. The sun and scavengers do the rest.

Varnia remained behind. He said he had to look into something which I thought it wise not to enquire about.

On the following day I was sitting beside a tank teeming with duck and Varnia appeared.

" Speaking of the man who returned from the tiger," he said, looking intently at me.

" We were not," I replied, thinking of the duck.

The little man continued : " After thy departure I searched the jungle wherein the man was taken. I searched with care and the ground spoke to me."

" What did the ground say ? "

" The ground told me that the tiger who took the man could not kill him."

" Why not ? "

" The tiger met another tiger."

" And ? "

" The two cats fought for the man."

" Was that written on the ground ? "

" How else could I know ? "

" Go on ! "

" Then did the man climb the tree on which he was discovered by the woman."

" He climbed while the two tigers fought ? "

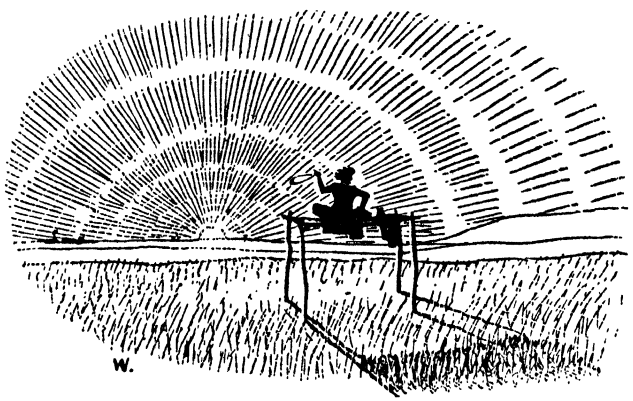
" Aye ! Thus was he preserved."

" Is he still preserved ? " I asked, anxiously.

" His widow is happy in the house of the headman."

It was as well, I suppose, that the madman was put to death. For was he not possessed by the spirit of the tiger and therefore a much feared man ?

Two up to Sala, the bitch.



CHAPTER XVII

Crime; Connivance; Happy Prisoners; Dacoity; Boothia, the Dacoit; Villages of Refuge; A Wild-cat Daughter; Boothia's Methods; A Policeman's Adventures; A False Kill; Boothia Surrenders; The Hanging of a Child.

CRIME in the States cannot be compared with similar offences in British India as the Bhils are a law abiding people who take to petty theft only when driven desperate by want. The inmates of State jails are therefore petty thieves, hot-headed ryots who have cracked usurer's skulls, and young bloods confined for burglary when the correct charge should have been entering a neighbour's house with the connivance of the neighbour's wife. Many a lover has, in fact, cheerfully confessed to burglary when discovered trespassing in a neighbour's hut.

The majority of prisoners in State jails are more or less content under their lethargic guards and some have to be forcibly ejected when their sentences have been completed.

I remember a Raja asking a prisoner how much longer he had to serve.

" Six months more," the cheerful man replied.

" He means six days, sir," corrected the Gaoler.

" No ! No ! yelled the unhappy man. " It cannot be ! It cannot be ! "

" Why doest thou wish to remain ? " I asked.

Turning to me with hands clasped, he wailed : " There be security here, with good food, warm blankets, and ease. But not so without these walls. Speak for me, sahib ! Speak for me or I be thrown out in a few days."

He was, however, a resourceful fellow and guessing that he had little chance of securing a few extra months respite without earning it, he leapt at the Raja and seized the royal shoulders with both hands. There he clung like a cat, while he expectorated vigorously in the Raja's face until he was prized off by the scandalized guards.

Unlike jails in British India, where petty criminals mix with the blackest of blackguards, the prisoners in State jails may associate only with those of their own kind. The petty offenders therefore suffer no contamination from association with seasoned criminals, and their offences, though sometimes oft repeated, rarely grow in magnitude.

Dacoity, or robbery by armed men, was unknown in the States till a petty thief named Boothia crossed the border into British India and was imprisoned for stealing a few glass bangles he coveted for his wild-cat daughter.

Boothia was an able little Bhil, and six months association with hardened criminals in a British jail opened his eyes to the quick returns and low overheads of dacoity. Thus the little man, hearing wonderful tales of murder, pillage, and wealth by robbery, determined to take to dacoity on his return to his State. He found no difficulty in collecting about himself half-a-dozen jail-mates, and their first dacoity brought them much wealth and many recruits. But Boothia was a novice and his first mistake was to change his territory. Instead of continuing with a new and successful opening in the States, where the police were few in number and indolent, he and his men crossed the border to raid the larger villages in British India. There the gang were quickly hunted down. Boothia was caught, and the remainder of his gang slipped back over the border and abandoned crime for the time.

While Boothia was being escorted by train to be charged in

British India, he slipped his hands through the handcuffs, jumped through the carriage window and was lost in the jungle.

" The police in British India be too clever for simple folk like us," he confessed to his followers when he got back. " But I thought much while with them and my plans are made. Henceforth we work in this our State where we have little to fear."

" Make thy meaning clear," growled one of the band.

" 'Tis this. In future we set aside certain villages which we raid not, and in return for our forbearance the men of such villages will give us shelter when the police be banded together to search for us."

" Aye ! " all exclaimed. " Such talk is true talk ! For when danger threatens we will fly to villages we have spared, and thus find shelter."

Fortified with that simple safeguard, Boothia and his men cornered a new industry in the State and brought off many successful dacoities in the space of a few months. Bad characters flocked to him, and he began to reject candidates who were unsuitable because of age or physique. To be passed medically fit by Boothia was an achievement and, " as strong as one of Boothia's men " became a stock phrase and the boast of the urchins in the State. On account of their activities, none of the gang would have been considered a good life by a reputable insurance company, but their objective was to have a good time while they lived and in that they were phenominally successful.

Boothia himself was a puny little man and he soon began to fear that his lack of physical strength might oust him from leadership. Accordingly he appointed his daughter, a slip of a girl of fourteen, to be deputy leader. She soon became one of the most daring of the gang and when it was found necessary to divide the gang so as to bring off dacoities in separate areas, she proved as efficient as her father.

Boothia's methods were abominably cruel. Before the gang surrounded a village, men were posted to guard all possible exits with instructions to cut down every man,

woman, or child who tried to escape. Then the gang, led by Boothia and his daughter, rushed the sleeping village and set fire to a few huts to give them light to work. The terrified villagers ran into the square where they were herded in a confused mass by the raiders. There, because the dacoits had to be quick workers, ear and nose rings were wrenched from women and children, and hands were lopped off to secure gaudy bangles. Men, who refused to disclose where their wealth was hidden, became garrulous when firebrands were thrust between their legs. Secretive women became equally garrulous when threatened by unmentional methods of torture.

But Boothia was as merciless to his followers as he was to the unfortunate victims he robbed, tortured, or murdered. In the early days, there were several instances where the men detailed to guard village exits were careless and escapes by able-bodied men or quick-witted villagers resulted. Boothia took stern measures to counter such indolence. After each raid, the loot-laden dacoits would slip back by twos and threes to some prearranged meeting place where the spoil was divided. They would then disperse to their villages and settle down in comfort till their money was spent when preparations would be made for another raid. But before they dispersed, if any villager had escaped, Boothia would confront the guard responsible and demand angrily: " How did it happen that one escaped past thee last night ? "

"He was a swift runner," the apprehensive man would reply.

" Take thy punishment, then ! " and Boothia would slash viciously at the man's leg with his sword. If a villager escaped by overpowering a guard, Boothia would cut at the unfortunate guard's arm and inflict a terrible wound. In one case after hanging a man whom an escaping woman had outwitted, Boothia glanced callously at the dangling body and said : " He was as brainless before he died."

Boothia always tried to make the punishment fit the crime. But he never killed with his own hand, although he encouraged his men and even his daughter to do so. Some said he

was a coward who feared he might be hanged if caught; but that was not the reason. Perhaps there was an element of chivalry in his wizened little body. He adored his daughter, the wild-cat murderer, and the misguided little man believed that, if he refrained from killing with his own hands, he would be able to bargain for her life if she happened to get caught.

It was while we were inspecting this much raided State that Colquhoun spoke sharply to the Raja:

"Raja sahib," he said, "I hear that Boothia and his gang are still at large."

"How did your honour become acquainted with that?" asked the surprised Raja.

"Ask a neighbouring village what is happening in yours," replied Colquhoun, quoting an aboriginal proverb.

"Alas, Your Honour, it is too true, but I have performed prodigious wonders in trying to apprehend the dacoits."

"Can you trust your police?" asked Colquhoun, trying to suppress a smile at the Raja's English.

"Who can say? Boothia bribes generously and has friends all over my State."

"Then, much as I dislike interfering in State affairs, the matter will be taken out of the hands of thy police," growled Colquhoun.

"What is thy meaning, sahib?"

"I mean to call in police from British India."

"Aree! Aree!" exclaimed the Raja. "The British police will settle in my State like locusts and eat up the land."

"They won't be as bad as that," grinned Colquhoun. "I will ask only for the loan of Peeler sahib and a few of his men."

"Then make it so, Your Honour."

"I intend to," said Colquhoun quietly.

About a month later, Peeler returned to Rajpur and reported that Boothia, his daughter, and some of the dacoits had been arrested and were lodged in the State jail. Colquhoun, who wanted to hear his story, asked Peeler and

myself to dinner and after the meal, Colquhoun said: "Now Peeler. Let's have it."

Peeler exhaled twin jets of smoke through his nostrils. "Boothia and his gang gave us the devil of a run. But I must admit that there were three things about Boothia that impressed me," he said thoughtfully.

"Yes?" we prompted.

"The fright he gave me; his daring; and his altruism."

"Altruism in a Bhil?" Colquhoun exclaimed.

"Yes!—in—a—Bhil," he said slowly. "I suppose I might as well start at the beginning, so here goes! As soon as I took over, my men were disguised as fakirs and instructed to try to find out the movements of the gang. A week later, a Bhil arrived at my camp with the news that a tiger had killed a buffalo and would I sit over the kill that night and rid them of a much-feared beast."

"Was it a moonlight night?" I asked.

"Yes, blast it!" snapped Peeler.

"What in hell makes you so touchy? You're as inflammable as a flapper!" I demanded indignantly.

"Sorry. But it still rankles to remember that even the moonlight had been arranged."

Peeler stopped a spate of questions by raising his hand.

"Soon after I had climbed a tree overlooking the kill, I heard a slight sound behind. I thought it was the tiger, but you can imagine the shock I got when a voice said: "Sahib! Turn thy head toward me, but touch thy rifle and thou art a dead man."

"When I looked behind I saw a wizened little man levelling a blunderbuss at me. Pretending not to be frightened, I demanded to know what he meant by pointing a gun at me and I threatened to arrest him when I got down. An engaging smile divided the little man's face and he said: "Look carefully sahib, for Boothia stands before thee." Still pointing the accursed gun at me, he continued: "The man thou huntest, hunts thee."

"I admit that I felt about a limp ahead of the under-

taker. I looked at the gun, and fearing that the blasted thing might go off at any moment, I tried to cut short the interview."

" Rather difficult when the interviewer has a gun loaded with slugs and bits of wire," Colquhoun chortled.

" Very," Peeler admitted feelingly. " More so when the gun is an old matchlock with a lighted fuse spluttering an inch or so above the priming." However, before I could object, the little swine said complainingly: " Why doest thou interfere between black men ? This matter of dacoity lies between men of my colour. It is a matter in which thou should have no say."

" I was in no mood to discuss the ethics of dacoity with him. Unabashed, he added to my discomfiture by pointing a toe at the buffalo carcase and stating contemptuously: " No black man would mistake that for the kill of a tiger. My men slew the buffalo by my orders and placed it beneath the tree. Then, sending a trusted man to lie to thee of a tiger kill, I hid here, knowing that thou would come hurriedly to slay the tiger that killed not."

" The man's audacity staggered me. He had actually baited me with a ground-trap ! I noticed his fingers twiddling with the trigger. " Go ! " I ordered, putting on abold front."

" He grinned up at me cheerfully. ' I go with a few words to the wise. Depart when I am gone and hunt me no more. As I spoke before, this is a matter between black men. And now, sahib,' he added impertinently, before he stepped back into the jungle and was gone, ' thou hast my permission to leave.' "

" Holy Moses ! The impudent fellow ! " Colquhoun interrupted, chuckling appreciatingly when told that the little blighter had employed the phrase we ourselves used when we dismissed subordinates.

Pausing for a drink, Peeler continued. " Boothia has a sense of humour."

" Judging from his last remark I should say he has a well developed sense of humour," laughed Colquhoun.

" I prefer to think of it as ' warped,' said Peeler ungener-

ously. " Anyway, about ten days after the tiger incident, one of my men reported that Boothia and his men were hiding in a patch of dense jungle near a large village."

" With the intention of raiding the village ? " I put in.

" I thought so. I hastily collected a number of men from the village and decided to drive the dacoits into the open. I spaced the villagers at five pace intervals along the fringe of the jungle, and before the beat commenced I took up a position with my armed police at the only possible exit, where the jungle thinned. Well, the villagers worked their way slowly through the jungle, shouting excitedly with drums beating. At the end of the beat several score of beaters clustered round me having driven from the jungle nothing but a few hare and a couple of squawking peacock. I of coursefelt pretty disgruntled at the result of my ruse and I was about to leave and return to my camp when a man among the crowd approached me and bending to the ground, said : " Salaam, sahib. Look well, for I am Boothia, the man thou huntest."

" Good God !" we murmured.

" Exactly ! " Peeler agreed. " I could hardly believe my eyes. When the man straightened out I had a good look at him, and sure enough, he was Boothia. I snapped out an order to seize him, but before any of my men could do so the elusive little devil had whipped round and disappeared among the throng of beaters."

" Well I'm damned," and Colquhoun's eyes were dancing with appreciation of Boothia's effrontery.

" It turned out, of course," continued Peeler ruefully, " that the villagers who formed our beaters were friendly to Boothia and his gang. Their village had been one that had been spared."

" So the dacoits mixed with the beaters and drove themselves toward you," I said with a grin.

Peeler nodded.

" What a grand little fellow this Boothia must be," said Colquhoun. " And what a risk to take to gratify his sense of humour ! "

" How did you eventually round him up ? " I asked.

" One of my men reported that in a certain village lived a man who was obviously poor. At intervals he would disappear and when he returned it was always with money to burn. That was enough for us. We persuaded the man to become an informer and thereby got to know when and where the next raid was to take place. It was as easy as that, and when the gang rushed the village we were waiting for them. We arrested most of the gang together with Boothia's daughter, but Boothia got away. It was then that I got to know how devoted Boothia was to his daughter. Within a few hours of the raid, the game little beggar sent me a message saying he would come to see me if I undertook not to arrest him. I agreed and some hours later he arrived alone at my camp, still wearing that friendly grin on his face. Much to my surprise, he came to the point without the usual flowery compliments."

" Sahib," he said as he squatted on his hunkers at my feet, " I have a favour to ask thee."

" Dacoits will find no favours here," I averred.

" 'Tis not for myself I ask," he replied eagerly.

" Whom then, O Man of Death ? "

" For my daughter, sahib."

" What of her ? "

" He looked anxiously up at me. ' Free her, and I swear to thee that she will rob no more.' "

" No doubt remarking my unresponsive attitude, he continued hurriedly : ' Remember, sahib, that she did but follow in her father's footsteps, as a daughter should. Be merciful therefore to one who is still a child. And in exchange for her freedom, I myself will surrender to thee."

" This was obviously his big moment and his black eyes searched my face anxiously. I remained silent, wondering how he would go on. After a moment's indecision, he continued : ' I pray thee to spare her life and take mine. Then will the Gods care for thee and all men will say : " The head of the snake is beneath Peeler sahib's feet ' "

" Again he paused, and then I spoke. ' Nay Boothia ! That may not be. The child has killed many with her own hands.' "

" But, Sahib," he explained eagerly, " the gain will be great. For my daughter is a weak woman, whereas I am a fearless man who can do much harm. Therefore, secure a man and free a child. Such is my comman-request."

" Would thou dare to threaten me, Boothia ? "

" Nay, sahib. Bhils threaten not," and he fingered an arrow meaningly.

" 'Tis well, then. But I tell thee that it is not within my power to carry out thy request. Moreover, thou hast no bargain in thy hands, for as sure as the sun sets I will secure thee whereinsoever thou hidest. Go now ! Thou hast my permission to depart."

" With that he placed his turban at my feet—a sign of submission. There were tears running down his cheeks as he whispered : ' Take me now, sahib, for I would be with my daughter. It would ill become me, nor could I find rest, if I am to be free while my daughter is held. So take me now, I pray thee.' "

" Nay, Boothia ! Thou came under my protection and goest likewise. Depart, for the talk is ended."

" Boothia rose and replaced his turban. In a broken voice he sighed : ' Salaam, sahib. I go, but thou wilt never secure me.' His ready smile was washed from his face and it seemed to me that the spring was absent from his stride. The last I saw of the little man as the jungle closed behind him was a drooping little figure with head bent."

" How did you manage to get him ? " I asked.

" I did not. After leaving me Boothia went to a police outpost and surrendered. ' I come to join my daughter,' he said. ' Perchance, when he learns that she is but a child, the Raja will release her in exchange for my life.' "

" That ended my part of the proceedings," said Peeler looking at Colquhoun. " It is up to you to try the prisoners."

" It's up to me to confirm their sentence," Colquhoun corrected Peeler.

* * *

Boothia received a life sentence, and his daughter, together with a dozen of the worst characters, were condemned to death. The remainder of the gang—those who were arrested —got varying terms of imprisonment.

Unhappily for me, the matter did not end there because the supervision of capital punishments formed part of my duties. It was a humane order initiated by Colquhoun.

Hanging is a terrible spectacle even when the ghastly business is carried out with drill-like precision and in the minimum of time. But when the sorry proceedings are undertaken by warders who are in a highly nervous state and to whom the taking of life is utterly abhorrent, it becomes the kind of nightmare that reoccurs in dreams.

The height and weight of the condemned have to be ascertained and the length of the rope calculated, as they are very necessary factors to assure instant death. Then follows a rehearsal by a number of unwilling warders to ensure that no unforeseen hitch occurs at the appointed time. Above all there must be no delay, and Indians are by nature dilatory.

One can steel oneself to hang a man in the knowledge that the world is well rid of a blackguard. But to set a child—and a girl-child—on a scaffold called for a devotion to duty almost beyond my capacity. A few minutes before she died, Boothia's daughter asked to see me. As I entered the condemned cell she rose and faced me. Her large brown eyes showed no sign of fear and a wave of pity surged through me as I looked at her childish figure. She wanted news of her father as she refused to believe the warders. When I told her, she asked me to give him her personal belongings.

" Hast thou no fear, then ? " I asked as I moved away.

" Why should I fear ? " she said quietly.

The words were spoken simply, with no trace of heroics. For all her callous crimes, she had made her peace with her pagan gods.

* * *

Some few weeks later I visited this State and the Raja informed me that Boothia was again at large.

" How did it happen ? " I asked.

" He was set at liberty by my orders," said His Highness.

" But why ? "

" I will explain. Soon after Boothia was apprehended, those of his gang who escaped arrest, again took to dacoity in my State. As is my custom, I visited the jail to look to the welfare of the ' malcontents ', when Boothia, who was lined up with the other prisoners, broke ranks and shouted : ' O Raja, sahib ! Only a thief can hear a thief's footsteps. Release me, therefore, and I swear to thee that I will find the dacoits and persuade them to commit no further dacoity in thy State. They will heed me, for were they not men of my choice ? ' "

" How can I trust thee ? " I asked Boothia.

" On my head be it," he replied.

" Thereupon I ordered Boothia to be freed. But that is not the end of the story," said the Raja.

" Please continue, Raja sahib."

" Boothia and his gang now live in my State, but they commit their depredations in the neighbouring States."

" Do thy neighbouring Rajas not complain, then ? "

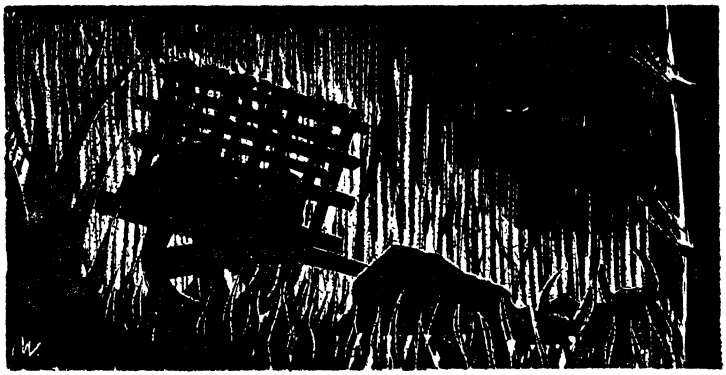
" They complain much, but I do not like them as they are too submissive to Colquhoun, sahib—' lick-spits ' I think you call them in English. Is it not ? "

" Lickspittle is the word. But this matter of dacoity has to be ended, even if Peeler sahib has again to be called for."

The Raja laughed. " In whose territory will Peeler sahib seek ? He may not enter into mine without my permission. And as Boothia has cleared my lands of dacoits, I will not allow Peeler sahib to search for him in my territory."

So Boothia prospered exceedingly for a while, but there came a day when neither Raja nor jungle gods were able to protect the unscrupulous little man.

Alas ! I was in at the death and equally powerless.



CHAPTER XVIII

Sala, the Tigress; She Kills a Priest; Varnia, the Fearless; Unpleasant Instructions; The Felling Camp.

BEFORE the birth of her cubs, Sala—pronounced Salar—the tigress, was a cattle-killer and therefore never molested the villagers who lived near the jungles which she frequented. They suffered her depredations because her presence helped to scare away deer and pig from their crops. Sala was a good-natured indolent creature and feared by none. Many an indignant herdsman had, in fact, been known to shoo her off a stolen meal and then to retrieve the remains. On such occasions the villagers feasted. For Bhils are not pernickety about food and a fly-blown carcase may be tastefully disguised with savoury herbs.

After her cubs were born, family cares limited Sala's range of action and, in consequence, mother and cubs went without food for long periods. But a hungry tigress, with whimpering cubs, is a potential man-eater and, Sala might have ended her days as a valuable guardian, had hunger not forced her to take to man. It was then that she developed a liking for human flesh and she also discovered that the

much feared man is the weakest and most defenceless among all animals.

During the course of one year Sala accounted for scores of villagers and many cartmen who risked journeying by night. Emboldened by success, Sala clawed through grass huts and seized the nearest victim. In the general confusion, primitive lights were overturned and the frenzied occupants shrieked for the help that never came. Then, in a confined space and in the dark, the unfortunate people crowded together or fought from a snarling horror that polluted the air with the stench of recent murders. But Sala seldom had the time to kill outright in a crowded hut and many declared that they heard her victims screaming while being carried away. Sometimes Sala leapt on to the raised platforms (machans) from which watchers guarded their crops and slipped down with an unwary watcher in her jaws. If disturbed by neighbouring watchers, Sala would sneak round in the opposite direction and, in the general uproar, she often managed to secure some other man.

The men were afraid to move freely about and the women dared not fetch water from jungle streams unless they were accompanied by bands of shouting men. The terrified people barricaded themselves in their huts long before it became dark. Couples, who occupied lonely huts on the outskirts of the jungle, crowded in with their neighbours and many of the smaller villages were deserted by those who flocked to the larger hamlets where they felt numerically safer. But the death roll continued to mount and it seemed as if the country was being gradually depopulated by a single tigress.

The area in which Sala was killing became deserted, for only those who had to watch their crops or tend to cattle, dared to venture forth. And then they went out accompanied by hordes of men with drums beating and much shouting. Bold as she was, Sala lacked the courage to face crowds of noisy men. Then Sala, who had developed a taste for human flesh and would eat no other, became straitened

for lack of food and determined to travel further afield. It was then that she killed the cartman I tried to rescue in a dream, and pulled from his machan—watcher's platform—the man who subsequently returned from the dead and who was finally murdered by his frightened fellows.

On returning to her former haunts, Sala continued to enter huts, but the people had become wiser and sometimes foiled her attempts with the aid of fire-crackers. She then conceived the bold idea of stalking herdsmen who were driving their cattle homewards. But cattle have no fear of tiger and the angry herds often turned about and drove her away. The cunning beast again altered her methods and took to lying up near villages. She waited till the herdsmen had byred their cattle and struck when the unsuspecting men were returning to their huts.

The uncertainty of her whereabouts and the certainty that she would strike again, brought days of anxiety and nights of anguish among the people. To add to their dread, the death cry, too often raised by night in nearby villages, sobbed out the tale of yet another murder.

Although Sala had killed scores of Indians, the price on her head was increased only when she came to grips with a Catholic priest—a white man.

Such, alas, is India.

Europeans were not permitted to enter the States, but as a special favour Colquhoun gave a brace of priests permission to cross the States on their way to British India. Both men refused the Raja's kindly offer of transport and set off on foot. A day or two later they arrived in the area where Sala was killing and decided to spend the night in a picturesque little rest-house, overlooking a deep ravine—one of Sala's favourite haunts.

After dinner, a meal provided by the khansama, they drew their chairs to the edge of the ravine where it was cooler and both the tired men, lulled by the jungle sounds, fell asleep. An hour or two passed and one of the priests woke, and saw the empty chair by his side. Thinking that his companion

had turned in, he rose and went to bed. Both men were due for another long tramp on the following morning, but the priest, who was thought to have turned in on the night before, did not appear at breakfast nor had his bed been slept in. A search was organized and to the searchers' horror, the missing man's head, feet, and hands—the typical remnants of a tiger's meal—were found in the ravine, almost immediately below where the priests had fallen asleep in their chairs. An examination of the remains and a cursory glance at the foot-prints of a tigress—the tracks of a tigress differ from those of the male—clearly proved that Sala had seized the sleeping man by the throat and had pulled him gently from his chair and into the ravine.

Sala was making history.

Those who had to work, hurried home long before sunset and sat beneath the village pepul tree to discuss the only topic of conversation.

" Where is she now, think ye ? " a man would whisper as men whisper in time of fear.

" Who knows ? " replied a companion. " Maybe she is waiting nearby for one among us."

" Why cannot the sahibs rid us of the terrible beast ? " whined an old man, monopolizing the communal hookah.

" What can the sahibs do, when even Varnia has but little power against her," said a youth as he glanced anxiously towards the jungle.

" God be with us," whispered the old man, " and let us depart to our huts for even now it darkens."

All rose and looked towards the jungle before they barricaded themselves in their huts.

* * *

Had I known what the future held, I'd have been less flippant when Colquhoun sent for me and asked me to join him at the club bar.

" Would you care to have the usual ? " he asked, knowing me.

Knowing myself, I replied: " Of course."

Fortified by a double gin, I asked why he had sent for me.

" I wished to speak to you about that man-eating tigress in Jhootpur State. She seems to be putting the fear of God among the people and its time she was killed."

" I've been after the bitch on two occasions."

" I did not know."

" Nor did I," I replied feelingly.

" What happened ? "

" On both occasions she drove me out of the jungle. I did not know she was Sala. Not at the time, I mean."

" Would you care to try again ? "

" I don't think so. You see," I continued hurriedly, " I may be as brave as the next man but three, and the next three men are, Peeler, O'Grady, and Kerridge. Peeler claims to be an excellent shot; its time that O'Grady lost some of his superfluous fat; and has not Kerridge been clamouring for Heaven ever since he collected that ecclesiastical bug ? "

" And what about you ? "

" May I remind you how often you've said: ' Anything can happen in India.' Well ! I don't want anything to happen to me in India. That's all."

" Not afraid, are you ? "

" No ! Just bloody scared. Besides, why should I be ordered to shoot Sala ? After all," and I quoted an Indian proverb: " an eagle does not catch flies ! "

Colquhoun chortled. " If," he said grimly, " that is how you feel about shooting tiger, you are the man."

I thought Colquhoun had changed the subject when he said: " You may remember that I asked you to select timber for that flume in Jhootpur State ? "

" I do."

" I suggest that you start on the work at once. The trees happen to be near the area frequented by Sala. And," he continued as if an afterthought, " while your men are engaged

in felling, you might as well see what you can do about getting rid of Sala."

It is only fair to state that Colquhoun and the others would have been delighted to have had the opportunity to kill Sala, but I was the one man in the station who was able to toy with his work, so the lot fell upon me.

Having agreed to do something about Sala, I turned to Colquhoun and said : " If I happen to wound Sala and then decide to follow her up, can you advise me of the kind of jungle in which I should exercise particular care ? "

" I take it that you are now thinking of bamboo, scrub jungle and ravine ? "

" Exactly ! "

" Let us assume," he said gravely, " that Sala travels for, say, half a mile after being wounded."

" Yes ? "

" In that case I'd advise you to be particularly careful along every inch of that half mile."

I made my Will in favour of the Twins and then ordered Varnia to collect one hundred fellers and to pitch my camp near the felling area.

The month was March, a bad season for felling trees and the ideal time for hunting tiger. The jungle had thinned and many of the more beautiful trees were in bloom. Varnia was blessed with an eye for lovely scenery and pitched the camp beneath a tope of mango trees nestling among low lying hills, feathered with bamboo and elephant grass. A narrow path led through the jungle for a distance of about half of a yell,* to a dry river from which the men obtained water by digging wells in the silvery sands.

*A yell is the Bhil unit of distance.
One yell is about a mile.
Thirty yells is a day's march.
Three yells is the distance it takes to smoke one native cigarette.
But yells vary according to lung power. There were

times when Varnia said: "It is but five cigarettes distant, sahib."

After hours of tramping, I often wondered if we were even keeping up with the blasted place we were trying to get to.

The surrounding jungles abounded with game. Many of the trees were denuded of bark where the deer rubbed the velvet from their antlers. At night the belling of sambur, the miau of wakeful peacock, and the whooping of monkey, told of prowling foes.

While the men were settling down during the first evening, Varnia sat beside my camp fire and spoke of Sala. He named her Sala, because sala, or brother-in-law, is a common swear word with incestuous implications. Those who angered the little man, instantly became brothers-in-law.

Varnia spoke of the night when he was returning from a village orgy.

"Sala nearly ate me," he said indignantly. "It is true that I had taken much drink, but the drink helped to clear mine eyes and thus was I enabled to see Sala in time."

"What happened?"

"I climbed a tree, like a monkey. She looked up at me as I looked down at her. But, sahib, I cannot tell thee how much I wished to look at her along the barrel of thy rifle."

I took the first opportunity of visiting some of the villages where Sala had done most of her killing and it filled me with pity to see fathers holding up babes whose mothers had been carried off, parents bewailing the loss of sons or daughters, and mute widows, sorrowful and lonesome. But my visits acted like a tonic. For, was not Sala as good as dead now that the sahib had arrived? The peoples' fate was centred in me and I felt as impotent as the family physician should feel when called to a critical case.

The felling of trees continued uneventfully, till the morning I came from my tent and noticed Varnia, standing on one leg and gazing at the ground like a meditating heron.

His pre-occupied look intrigued me. " What ails thee ? " I asked.

He recovered from his trance and replied : " They are come."

" Who are they ? " I asked.

Varnia scratched a dirty thigh and spat contemptuously. " Sala and her cubs, sahib."

" Phew ! " I whistled.

A slight pause and he said cheerfully : " Last night she killed a man near this our camp."

" How came such knowledge to thee ? Thou wert not wandering about the jungle by night ? Wert thou, O fool ? "

He grinned. " Nay, sahib. But I was wakened by the noise of two large animals running through the jungle. It was then that I knew that a man had been killed."

" How so ? "

" In this wise. As I said, there were two large animals and they made much noise. Had they been sambur, they would have run swiftly and silently. So it was that I came to know that a tiger had taken a man from his cart. For only frightened bullocks would have wakened the jungle in such a manner."

" What then ? "

" About one hour before the dawn, the time when day lies near unto night (the false dawn) I rose and entered the jungle."

" Thou madman ! "

" Maybe," he agreed, smilingly. " Then, walking with care from tree to tree, I came upon the place where Sala took the man."

" Was it her work ? "

" In truth it was ! A cart was overturned and, seeing many flies assembled on a dark patch on the ground, for it was then light, I beheld much blood. Looking here, looking there, and climbing trees at any sound, I went forward and came upon the pug marks of a tigress and her cubs."

" How big were the cubs ? "

" As big as large dogs. Then, advancing but a short distance, I beheld a turban marked with blood. But such is not the full tale, sahib."

" What more, O fool ? "

" I beheld Sala ! "

" The devil you did ! " I exclaimed.

" Aye. She made no sound as she came toward me, but I saw her in time and, climbing a tree with swiftness, I looked down at her as she looked up at me with eyes as bold as a village harlot."

" When did you venture down ? "

Varnia laughed and said : " Knowing that these man-eating cats are well fed and not over-blest with patience, I descended from the tree soon after she moved aside. But I blackened her face by throwing stones in her direction before I came away. The tale is told, sahib."

" What remains to be done, Varnia ? As thou knowest, the jungle is too thick to enable men to beat Sala toward me and she will not return to that which remains of the man that she and her cubs have devoured. So what say ye ? "

" I say this. That none of the sahib's ways of killing tiger will meet with success. But it is in my mind that Sala can be killed by two bold men."

" How, O Jungly ? "

" In this manner. It is known that many runners carrying the mail have been overtaken and killed by Sala, who is attracted by the sound of the bells carried by such men. It is in my mind that thou and I will this night take the place of the runner and pass through the jungle where Sala resides. I will carry the sounding bells and will run a little behind thee and thy rifle. Sala, hearing the bells, will assuredly come to us and to her death by thy rifle."

Varnia noted my look of astonishment and hastily added : " Have no doubt that she will show herself before she attacks. Do I not know ? I therefore say that she will show herself in the moonlight for thee to kill."

I was far too astounded to reply. I was amazed at

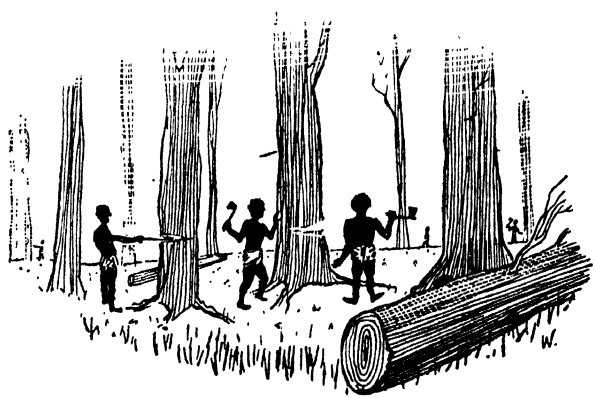
Varnia's temerity in suggesting that we should stroll out and become a jingling bait for Sala. The thought of being taken, or mistaken for a postal runner, corrugated the greater part of my face.

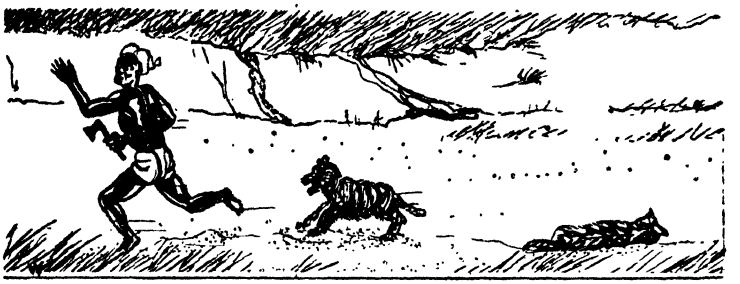
Varnia read my thoughts and tried to allay my fears by firing unconvincing questions at me.

" Do I not know Sala ? " he asked. " Is it not true that she has made me climb like a monkey ? Do I not know that she always shows herself before she attacks ? For, is she not overbold through lack of fear ? "

My doubtful look continued to puzzle the little man. His face lengthened. He could not understand why an armed white man should be afraid of a tigress. Then he brightened and said tactfully : " It is in the nature of the white man to be careful in the jungle. Therefore, give me permission to take thy rifle and I will go forth this night with but one other man to carry the bells. We will return in the morning with the skin of Sala and maybe those of her cubs."

Varnia's attempt to excuse my fears roused me. I said angrily : " Depart madman ! Go and rest, for thou and I wilt seek for Sala this night."





CHAPTER XIX

Night of Fear ; Varnia's Escape ; Funeral Rites.

AT sunset the rising moon seemed to wink—it may have been caused by a passing cloud—at a pessimist (myself) leading an optimist (Varnia) in our search for an animal that was perhaps only too eager to be found. I was haunted by the fear that we might be unlucky and find Sala, whereas Varnia was certain that we could not fail to miss her. And Vania insisted that we should commence the search along the track from where the man had been killed during the previous night. As we approached the scene of the tragedy, a humming of awakened flies warned us that we were near the place. Varnia stopped suddenly and pointed his toe at a dark patch on the track. " Much blood was shed here, for Sala caught the man by the throat," he said casually.

" Ugh ! " I exclaimed and looked about nervously, before stepping over the dried blood.

The sandy track led through a forest of sâl saplings that looked like silvery ghosts in the moonlight. The track skirted deep nullahs, perfect retreats for tiger, ribboned around sombre bamboo clumps and dipped into gloomy ravines, darkened by overhanging branches. We halted to listen when we came upon open glades, but the only sounds that broke the eerie silence were the occasional gurgling of nightjar and the plaintive cries of disturbed curlew.

It pleases me to remember that even Varnia hesitated before leaving the comparative safety of the open glades for the darker jungle.

Some two hours of searching for an animal which I was not anxious to find, found me longing for home and comfort. It was then that Varnia muffled his bells—how I loathed the sound of those blasted bells !—and held me by a touch.

" What is it ? " my teeth chattered.

" Dost hear a fox bark ? " he asked.

" Aye."

" Sala is not far distant."

" Can thou smell her, then ? " I snarled, irritated by fear.

" Nay, sahib," he replied seriously. " But a fox follows a tiger to eat the remains of the kill. When a fox barks like that one "—Varnia shrugged his shoulders.

Varnia's shrug of resignation frightened me.

" It would be wise to go with care now," he whispered warningly.

" How in hell *can* we be more careful, you damned fool ! " I exploded indignantly.

We moved forward slowly and I noticed that even Varnia, who was accustomed to meeting tiger, looked drawn in the moonlight. On approaching an area where the track curved round an outcrop of rock, we stopped and looked at one another anxiously. I sensed trouble among those rocks and so did the little man by my side. He clutched the bells with one hand and, placing the other hand before his eyes, steadily scanned the rock outcrop. We stood in silence for a moment or so and then moved forward step by step.

Varnia then lost his self-control.

Yelling : " Bhanchute ! Bhanchute ! " he rushed forward, swung the bells round his head, and with a final : " Bhanchute ! " he hurled them among the rocks.

I expected to hear the " Augh " of an angry tiger, but the only sounds that reached our ears was the swish of grass and the scattering of pebbles. Varnia and I climbed a tree and remained there till dawn.

Round No. 1 was a draw.

When the fellers had heard our story, they chaffed the redoubtable Varnia for failing to kill Sala with a handful of bells. He, of course, retaliated by accepting them all as brothers-in-law, but constant repetition frayed his nerves and he deserted us. However, he returned late one evening with a vulgar song on his lips, creepers intwined in his hair, and very drunk. He approached me from all directions, fell on his knees, poured dust on his head, and asked to be forgiven. On being forgiven, Varnia rose and suggested that we should make further plans to hunt down Sala, but I told him I was too busy to fool about at night.

For the next few days Varnia plagued me like a hangnail. He was anxious to wipe out the past and therefore invented terrible stories of Sala's depredations, in order to frighten the men and to persuade me to undertake another suicidal stalk.

One evening when I was sitting beside a log fire, Varnia edged up to me and morbidly said : " Sala might kill one of our men."

I poked a log with my foot and pretended to be deaf.

" If she kills one of our men, will not the others run away ? "

" What is in thy mind ? " I asked.

" Sala," he spoke rapidly, " has taken many cartmen from their carts at night. Why, therefore, do we not also become cartmen and thereby deceive her, the bitch ? "

" How so, fool ? "

" Sahib," he continued gravely, " It is in my mind to drive a cart through the jungle at night with thee sitting in the cart. Sala will hear us and when she comes forth to take me——"

" Where wilt thou sit ? " I asked.

" I will sit as cartmen sit. On the pole between the bullocks."

" And ? "

" When Sala rushes forth, bang will go thy rifle and Sala will meet her death."

Varnia's plan, No. 2 seemed more unpleasant than his plan, No. 1. And No. 1 ended in a draw.

I explained to Varnia that if we continued to act as decoys there would be no end to the number of parts we might have to undertake. How about the two virgins who entered the jungle to fetch water and who were devoured by Sala? He blushed aside the idea of appearing as a virgin and pressed me to consider his suggestion.

Much as I disliked his many inventions, I agreed that some action had to be taken if we hoped to retain the services of the men. The suggestion that we should stalk Sala from within a bullock cart, was utterly repugnant to me, but I was forced to agree and the necessary cart was procured. Varnia and I spent the greater part of the following day in making the cart tiger-proof by building a cage of stout timbers over the top. When we had completed the work, a dummy cartman made from straw was tied in a sitting position on the top of the cart, and Varnia then explained our plan to the expectant men.

" The sahib and I," he said, somewhat boastfully, " will sit within the cart. I will drive the bullocks and when Sala rushes forth to seize the man of straw, the sahib will shoot his rifle into her stomach. Thus will Sala's death be accomplished."

Varnia and I bowed before the storm of applause.

We, however, reckoned without the bullocks.

Once again Varnia and I were acclaimed as camp-heroes, and many of the men, who clustered around to see us off, volunteered to change places with Varnia when they saw how safe he seemed in his cage. But Varnia refused to be deheroed and off we went. I, with a sense of foreboding, and Varnia, in an exultation of showing off. Varnia drove the bullocks in the customary Indian manner by jerking at nose rings, twisting tails, and prodding intimately with his toes.

We spent two cooped-up nights, meandering at about a mile an hour through the jungles and only saw some sambur

trotting ahead with horns laid along their flanks, and a sounder of pig that parted round the cart like waves.

Sala found us on the third night.

The bullocks were plodding slowly along and all was quiet, till a herd of startled curlew rose from a nearby marsh, frog skimmed across the water, and some small animal rushed through the grass and leapt across the track. Varnia looked back at me and whispered: " Sala ! "

I braced myself against a strut, slipped my rifle through an opening in the cage, and waited for " the appointed time." A moment later the bullocks swerved and swung the cart at right angles to the track. Both animals stared intently at the jungle and then plunged and heaved as they tried to get rid of the yoke from their necks. As we were being tossed about in the cart, Sala uttered a short coughing roar and leapt on to the roof of the cage. Her great weight made the timbers creak and Varnia, fearing that she might break through, flattened himself on the floor of the cage like an ironed tick.

God ! How that beast's breath stank !

Before I had the time to fire, Sala seized the man of straw and nearly swept the cage away with a might throw of her powerful legs. That was too much for the bullocks. They plunged loose, turned the cart on its side, and bolted.

Varnia and I spent an uncomfortable night in an upset cart, listening to the distant grunts of a duped tigress. And that was the only time I heard the little man laugh outright. He seemed to find something amusing in seeing an omnipotent white man trussed up in a cage. I allowed his ill-timed laughter to hush by me, but I promised to give him a hiding later on. We crawled from our cage at daybreak and walked back to the camp in silence. I was in no mood to talk and Varnia dared not speak lest some chance remark reminded us of the promised hiding.

A few nights later, shouts of " Tiger ! Tiger ! " woke me. I leapt from my bed, grabbed hold of my rifle and lantern and rushed into the tent occupied by the men.

" Sala is prowling around," Varnia growled.

" I heard nothing," I whispered.

" We heard a twig break. She will not tread on pebbles or dry leaves, but cannot avoid the twigs which break beneath her."

The surrounding camp-fires were burning brightly, so we felt reasonable safe, and I decided to spend the night among the men.

On the following morning a search for pug-marks proved that Sala and her cubs had encircled the camp during the previous night. It seemed that she had picked on our camp for her next kill. After breakfasting, one hundred nervous men, led by Varnia, filed out of camp on their way to the felling area. But very little work was done during that day. The slightest sound made the men bunch together or climb trees. I tried to hearten them by patrolling the jungle with my rifle, but I also felt nervous as I, too, sensed that I was not alone. Something seemed to be near me. Uncomfortably near. Something that moved when I moved. That advanced or retreated as I wandered round the men. Fear followed me wherever I went. I felt I was being watched. I pictured Sala's unblinking yellow eyes as she crept forward to lessen the distance between us. I imagined her moving forward inch by inch as she took advantage of the slightest cover; her huge head just clear of the ground; muscles tensed; and striped tail nervously twitching. I wanted to act; to rush forward, shouting oaths; to fire my rifle; to collect the men and drive her away; to do anything rather than wait alone in the lengthening shadows. I cupped my hand to my ear over and over again, dreading to hear the warning snap of a twig, but perhaps Sala was more than usually careful or the deafening drumming of cicada muffled other sounds.

I blew my whistle to cease work at about an hour before sunset and walked backwards to rejoin the men. On the way back to camp I felt unnerved by the stillness of the jungle,

the gloom beneath the trees, and the frightened, silent, barefooted men. Half a mile from the camp, a narrow ravine overshadowed by tamarisk bushes, ran parallel with the path. Here the pace quickened and we looked about anxiously, but just before we reached the open country, I heard shouts of "Tiger! Tiger!" from the men at the head of the file. I race forward and found Varnia lying on his back and surrounded by jabbering men.

Sala had bungled.

She had, it seemed, crept along the ravine and leapt at Varnia who happened to be at the head of the file. But she failed to secure him and bolted when his brave companions attacked her with axes. Apart from a few superficial scratches Varnia was uninjured. He, however, collected a brother-in-law, when one of the men said reproachfully: "Didst thou not say that Sala was overbold and wouldst show herself before she attacked?"

We arrived back at our camp without further unpleasant interruptions and, although additional fires were set around the camp, more than one man heard the snapping of twigs during the earlier part of the night.

Shortly before dawn I was wakened by a number of men. They rushed into my tent, shouting: "Awake, sahib! Awake! Varnia and one other is missing! Varnia and one other is missing!"

"What has happened?" I yelled as I leapt out of bed.

"None can say," replied a man, "but Sala grunted nearby and woke me. It was then that I saw that Varnia and the man who slept near unto him was gone."

When dawn broke I accompanied a tracker to hunt for the missing men. The tracker pointed at fresh footprints on the path leading to the river. The footprints were evenly spaced, at normal intervals, and therefore clearly indicated that two men were in no hurry on their mysterious journey to the river. We followed the footprints for a few yards and then the stooping tracker straightened up and looked at me.

" Look ! Look ! " he cried and pointed at the path.

I did so and was horrified to see that the men's footprints were partly obliterated by the huge-pugmarks of a following tiger. The three tracks led in the direction of the river, but one pair of widely spaced human tracks—the owner was on the run—branched right and led us to a tree, in which we found a very frightened man. He was persuaded to come down and tell us what had happened. Soothed by a pinch of opium, the scared man said: "Being troubled by my bowels early this morning, I wished to seek relief in the jungle, but dared not enter therein for fear of Sala. It was then that Varnia arose, grasped his axe, and went forth from the tent."

" Didst thou hear Sala call at that time ? " one of the men asked.

" I know not. I spoke to Varnia and he spoke not. Thinking, therefore, that he too wished to visit the jungle and for the same purpose, I rose and followed him. When we were a short distance beyond the fires surrounding the camp, I called to him to go no further, but he heeded not and continued on his way toward the river."

" Varnia was always without fear," muttered a feller.

" Being overcome by terror, I turned to return and saw Sala standing between us and the camp fires."

" Ah ! " murmured the surrounding men.

" Whereupon I turned once more and fled along the path after Varnia. But he was ahead and I was filled with fear, so I ran to a tree nigh unto the river and climbed therein."

" And Varnia ? " I asked.

" Soon after I climbed the tree, I beheld him standing on the sand in the river bed. The moon was yet bright and the sand is white," he added.

" And then ? "

" Varnia looked about him as one who is bewildered. Then it was that Sala spoke."

" Ah ! " exclaimed the men again.

" Aye ! Sala spoke from within the jungle near unto the river bank. Whereupon Varnia ran along the sand and was lost to mine eyes."

The tracker rose. " Let us search for Varnia," he said.

We found no difficulty in reading the story written on the sand. Varnia had sprinted down the river bed, but the unfortunate fellow had also been pursued by a tigress and two cubs.

I shall not attempt to recapture the tracker's gestures, his oaths, or his threats of revenge, but when we examined the place from where the bewildered Varnia took to his heels and ran along the river bed, these were the tracker's words.

" Here be from where Varnia ran."

We followed Varnia's footprints for a short distance. The tracker stopped. " And here be where he was overtaken by Sala."

" God ! " I murmured.

He studied the sand for a moment. " Sala held Varnia to the ground by one ' hand '."

" How dost thou know ? "

" The sand tells me that three of her ' hands ' lay on the ground. Her fourth ' hand ' therefore lay across Varnia."

" What more dost the sand say ? "

" The sand says, Varnia was not then injured, for there be no blood about. It also says, that Varnia could not free himself because of the great weight of Sala's 'hand' on his body.

I shuddered.

" Look ! Look ! " he cried. " Behold the pug-marks of Sala's cubs. Sala called and they ran to her.

" For what purpose, think ye, that Sala called ? "

" It is in my mind," he said thoughtfully, " that Sala wished to teach her cubs to kill."

" Why should such a thought enter thy mind ? "

" Because it is in the nature of such beasts to kill without delay. Whereas Sala waited beside her food for some reason. Wherefore do I say that she waited for her cubs to do their own killing.

" God ! " I exclaimed.

The tracker pointed at the sand and wailed : " It is here that Sala released Varnia. Whereupon Varnia rose and ran, with the cubs running beside him."

" And Sala ? What of her ? " I whispered anxiously.

" Sala moved not at first. She lay and watched her cubs. But what do I see here ? "

He answered his own question. " It is written that Sala rose and : Sahib ! Sahib ! look well at the length of her stride ! she rose and bounded down the river in the direction of Varnia and her cubs. Was she angered or did she fear to lose Varnia ? "

" Who knows ? Let us go forward and see."

We followed the tracks left by Sala, Varnia, and the cubs, and came on the body of a cub. The cub's spine had been severed by an axe. " Aree ! Aree ! " yelled the tracker. " Varnia stayed to fight here. The cubs were too fast for him, but he was as big as they were small. He killed one with his axe and ran again. But look ! Sala was watching and saw the killing. May the Gods be with Varnia for Sala's pug-marks speak as clearly as words. As she raced after Varnia, she stopped, it may be that she stopped to sniff at the body of her cub, and then followed Varnia with great swiftness. Let us hurry now."

We finally came upon signs of a scuffle on the sand and a patch of dried blood, but there were no further traces of Varnia.

The tracker pointed at the pug-marks of tigress and cub. " She and her cub left here and entered the jungle."

" And Varnia ! " I choked.

He shrugged his shoulders.

" Give the word," he sighed, " and I will lead thee to—to—what we may find."

" I wish to find Sala," I said sternly.

" She will not be found, sahib."

" Why not, fool ? "

" Is she not with her young ? Sala is bold, but she will not face danger when with her cub."

" Lead ! " I commanded.

He tightened his loin cloth, placed the handle of his axe between his teeth, and crouched between my legs.

We then commenced to flinch our way through the jungle in search of Sala. I expected to hear Sala growl when disturbed, but the jungle was stilled except for the noisy drumming of my heart. A few yards of flinching and the tracker exclaimed : " Aree ! Aree ! " and then collapsed at my feet.

Indians are apt to faint at the sight of human blood.

Varnia's remains were burnt on a funeral pyre at sunset, but not before a Byga (medicine-man) laid poor Varnia's spirit. The Byga held a dead jungle cock, some rice, a few bamboo shoots, and tiptoed round the place where Varnia was devoured. He then slipped into the jungle and, pretending to be the tigress, he leapt on to the fatal spot, where he crouched on all fours and chewed a mouthful of blood-stained earth.

Varnia's spirit was then at rest and Sala was prevented from wandering about the jungle with Varnia as her guide.

During the drinking ceremony that followed the burning of Varnia's remains, all agreed that Varnia went to Sala because she called to him. As an Elder put it : " Sala claimed him amongst us when we were returning from our work. Was he, therefore, not her man ? "

But I wondered if, after his awesome experience, Varnia was troubled in mind and walked in his sleep.

Sala and her cub disappeared for a time and were next heard of in a distant State, where again she took to her murderous activities. One evening, however, Sala and her cub stalked a child who was in charge of a herd of buffalo. But buffalo have little fear of tiger. The herd turned about and trampled Sala and her cub beyond recognition.

A few weeks after Varnia's death, Peeler, accompanied

by two mounted constables, rode to my camp. He dismounted and complained of a thirst he had collected during their long journey. I handed him his usual drink and then said: "What in hell are you doing in this part of the country?"

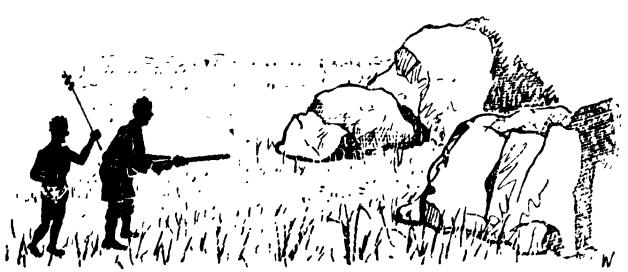
Instead of replying to my question, he growled: "Where is Varnia?"

Before I could tell him what had happened, he said: "I hold a warrant for the arrest of Varnia, alias Boothia."

So Varnia, the Bhil, was also Boothia, the Dacoit.

It was fortunate, I suppose, that Varnia died. For I might have had to prepare the scaffold for Boothia, the Dacoit, who was also my little friend Varnia, the Bhil.

However, Varnia became a legendary hero among the Bhils, and whether it be cause and effect, none can say, but a surprising number of Bhil girls named their children after Varnia.



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